

Byzantine Political Culture and Compilation Literature in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries

Some Preliminary Inquiries

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Byzantine political history can be approached from a number of different directions. One way into the subject is to focus on who did what to whom. Another is to investigate imperial ideology and political thought.¹ A third approach, and the one I employ here, is to focus less on political personalities, events, ideology, or philosophy than on the behavior and expectations that provided the context for political action and ideas. Among western medievalists, it has become increasingly common to describe this kind of historical inquiry with the label *political culture*.² In contrast, Byzantinists rarely have explicitly identified political culture as a field.³ One of the strengths of political culture as an approach is that it allows historians to uti-

lize sources other than those traditionally employed to discuss politics. In this study, I conduct a preliminary exploration of a variety of literature that was ubiquitous in Byzantium but that has hitherto played only a very secondary role in the analysis of domestic political history. That source is compilation literature, in particular a number of handbooks concerned with state affairs and military matters that were produced during the tenth and early eleventh centuries.

In what follows I argue that compilation literature—above all, those handbooks concerned with state affairs and military matters—can cast light on a series of issues central to Byzantine political culture, including the legitimization of power, the shaping and regulation of expectations, the development of careers, and even the conduct of political debate. In making these arguments, I move toward two further conclusions: first, that interpreting these sorts of Byzantine compilations within the context of political culture offers additional ways of thinking about Byzantine politics beyond the lurid narratives of coups, assassinations, and faction that litter the pages of so much medieval Byzantine historiography; and second, that this particular contextualization may offer some resolution to debates about whether such literary artifacts represent exercises in practical use or in antiquarian preservation. Paradoxically, this study will show that the antiquarian elements of the Byzantine compilations under scrutiny were in some senses their most useful features, while the apparently practical and innovative elements could be highly conservative.

1 D. Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204–1330* (Cambridge, 2007).

2 The work of Gerd Althoff has been particularly influential, especially his *Verwandte, Freunde und Getreue: Zum politischen Stellenwert der Gruppenbindungen im frühen Mittelalter* (Darmstadt, 1990); trans. C. Carroll as *Family, Friends and Followers: Political and Social Bonds in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 2004).

3 Of course, one could argue that scholars of Byzantium have been responsible for several studies that should be at the heart of any discussion about the nature and scope of medieval political culture, including M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge, 1988); J.-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance* (Paris, 1990); N. Koutrakou, *La propagande impériale byzantine: Persuasion et réaction (VIIIe–Xe siècles)* (Athens, 1994); and G. Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre: Étude sur le “césaropapisme” byzantin* (Paris, 1996), trans. J. Birrell as *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium* (Cambridge, 2003).

Definitions and Problems

It is hardly controversial to argue that a very considerable proportion of written culture in medieval Byzantium came into existence through processes of compilation—that is to say, through the copying, summarizing, excerpting, reordering, amalgamating, and updating of preexisting materials. Particularly well-known and frequently cited examples of such productions are the so-called encyclopedias devoted to statecraft that are associated with the tenth-century emperor Constantine Porphyrogenetos: the *De administrando imperio*, the *De cerimoniis*, the *De thematibus*, and the *Excerpta*. However, examples of literature produced by processes of compilation also abound in earlier and later periods. Compilations are to be found in a wide variety of other disciplinary fields, including military science, human and veterinary medicine, agriculture, hagiography, law, and dream interpretation, as well as in the arena of moralizing literature.⁴ Compilation literature has proved notoriously difficult to taxonomize, and not all scholars have been happy with descriptive labels such as *encyclopedia* or *handbook*.⁵ Yet, despite problems with categorization, scholarly interest in such literature is currently very

high, often focusing on the mechanics of compilation.⁶ Nonetheless, before we can go on to consider the political contexts and ramifications of compilation literature, a little more thought needs to be applied to the question of what is meant by this somewhat arbitrary category of Byzantine written culture, above all because compilations themselves demonstrate so much variation in size, manner of composition, linguistic register, anticipated audience, and subject matter.

One particular problem associated with the term *compilation literature* is its very elasticity. In this context,

4 On moralizing compilation literature, see M. Richard, “Florilèges grecs,” in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité: Spiritualité du catholicisme en France et dans les pays de langue française des origines à 1914*, ed. M. de Certeau et al., 5 vols. (Paris, 1964), 5:475–512; P. Odorico, “Gli gnomologi sacro-profani: Una presentazione,” in *Aspetti di letteratura gnomica nel mondo antico*, ed. M. S. Funghi, 2 vols. (Florence, 2003–04), 2:61–96. Recent editions include S. Ihm, *Erste kritische Edition einer Redaktion des sacro-profanen Florilegiums Loci Communes Ps.-Maximus Confessor* (Stuttgart, 2001); D. Searby, *The Corpus Parisinum: A Critical Edition of the Greek Text, with Commentary and English Translation* (New York, 2007). A European academic consortium is constructing an important project on collections of moralizing sayings (*gnomologia*) in Greek and Arabic, which will have a profound impact on the study of the composition and reception of compilations within Byzantium and the Near East more generally.

5 P. Odorico, “La cultura della *sylloge*, 1) Il cosiddetto enciclopedismo bizantino, 2) le tavole del sapere di Giovanni Damasceno,” *BZ* 83 (1990): 1–21. B. Flusin, “Les *Excerpta* constantiniens: Logique d’une anti-histoire,” in *Fragments d’historiens grecs: Autour de Denys d’Halicarnasse: Histoire d’un texte*, ed. S. Pittia (Rome, 2002), 556, prefers *sylloge* or *florilegia*; “encyclopedia” is also rejected by C. Högel, *Symeon Metaphrastes: Rewriting and Canonization* (Copenhagen, 2002), 95.

6 Recent studies include the whole of *TM* 13 (2000), on the *De cerimoniis* (hereafter cited as *De cer.*); see also J. Featherstone, “Preliminary Remarks on the Leipzig Manuscript of *De Cerimoniis*,” *BZ* 95 (2002): 457–78; idem, “Further Remarks on the *De Cerimoniis*,” *BZ* 97 (2004): 113–21; J. F. Haldon, ed. and trans., *Constantine Porphyrogenitus: Three Treatises on Imperial Military Expeditions* (Vienna, 1990); G. T. Dennis, *The Taktika of Leo VI*, CFHB 49 (Washington, DC, 2010); idem, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, CFHB 25 (Washington, DC, 1985); E. McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the 10th Century*, DOS 33 (Washington, DC, 1995); D. Sullivan, *Siegecraft: Two Tenth-Century Instructional Manuals by “Heron of Byzantium,”* DOS 36 (Washington, DC, 2000); idem, “A Byzantine Instructional Manual on Siege Defense: The *De obsidione toleranda*: Introduction, English Translation and Annotations,” in *Byzantine Authors: Literary Activities and Preoccupations: Texts and Translations Dedicated to the Memory of Nicolas Oikonomides*, ed. J. Nesbitt (Leiden, 2003), 139–266; J. H. Pryor and E. M. Jeffreys, *The Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ: The Byzantine Navy ca. 500–1204* (Leiden, 2006); A. McCabe, *A Byzantine Encyclopaedia of Horse Medicine: The Sources, Compilation and Transmission of the Hippiatrica* (Oxford, 2007); Flusin, “Les *Excerpta* constantiniens”; Högel, *Symeon Metaphrastes*. These more recent studies are often in dialogue with earlier investigations, esp. P. Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme byzantin: Notes et remarques sur enseignement et culture à Byzance des origines au Xe siècle* (Paris, 1971); I. Ševčenko, “Re-reading Constantine Porphyrogenitus,” in *Byzantine Diplomacy*, ed. J. Shepard and S. Franklin (Aldershot, 1992), 167–95. Important foundations for the study of compilation literature, especially of works produced in the reign of Constantine Porphyrogenetos, were established in the early 20th century: L. Cohn, “Bemerkungen zu den konstantinischen Sammelwerken,” *BZ* 9 (1900): 154–60; T. Büttner-Wobst, “Die Anlage der historischen Encyklopädie des Konstantinos Porphyrogenitus,” *BZ* 15 (1906): 88–120; J. B. Bury, “The Treatise *De Administrando Imperio*,” *BZ* 15 (1906): 517–77; idem, “The Ceremonial Book of Constantine Porphyrogenetos,” *EHR* 22 (1907): 209–27; C. de Boor, “Suidas und die konstantinische Excerptsammlung,” *BZ* 21 (1912): 381–424; 23 (1914–19): 1–127. Further and more recent work on the statecraft manuals associated with Constantine include T. Pratsch, “Untersuchungen zu *De thematibus* Kaiser Konstantins VII. Porphyrogenetos,” in *Varia V*, *Byzantina Poikila* 13 (Bonn, 1994), 13–145; C. Sode, “Untersuchungen zu *De Administrando Imperio* Kaiser Konstantins VII. Porphyrogenetos,” in *ibid.*, 146–260.

we have to ask whether it is legitimate to include within its scope relatively short treatises, such as the *De administrando* or the two military manuals associated with the Phokas family (the *De velitatione* and the *Praecepta militum*), as well as much bigger assemblages such as the *Excerpta*, the *Menologion* of Symeon Metaphrastes, and the *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos. In addition to the uncertainty about size, should we be worried about inconsistencies in compositional method? Does it matter that some compilers were happy to copy verbatim from the underlying texts, exhibiting little interest in reworking the materials that they transmitted, while others were far readier to intervene, committed to the addition of new material, to the paraphrasing of existing sources, and on occasion to the very substantial reordering of the underlying authorities?⁷ Moreover, how problematic are variations in style? Is the category of compilation literature rendered redundant by the willingness of some compilers to allow the texts they assembled to retain the voice of their original authors, even if doing so meant that the eventual assemblage did not conform to a single style? Or by the desire of others to impose more stylistic homogeneity by either upgrading or downgrading the linguistic register of the texts they were editing to make them more acceptable, palatable, or comprehensible?⁸ How

concerned should we be about inconsistencies in the pedigree of source materials? Many middle Byzantine compilers, for instance, had a preference for materials from late antiquity written in Greek.⁹ But this did not preclude more recently produced Greek texts from being integrated into compilations or used as their basis, as several tenth- and early eleventh-century military manuals demonstrate.¹⁰ And if compilers' attitudes toward the antiquity of their sources could vary so much, is the rigor of our definition further undermined by the willingness

7 Verbatim copying in the 10th century from a late antique compilation is visible in recension M of the *Hippiatrica*; that late antique model was more substantially rearranged by the compilers working on other recensions, including B, which is associated with the imperial scriptorium of Constantine Porphyrogenetos (McCabe, *Horse Medicine*, 26–27, 53, 261–82).

8 Both the retention of original “voices” and attempts to elevate them are visible in the different recensions of the *Hippiatrica* (McCabe, *Horse Medicine*, 261–82). Stylistic upgrading of underlying sources is most often associated with the collecting and rewriting of hagiographical materials by Symeon Metaphrastes (Høgel, *Symeon Metaphrastes*), but in order to produce a homogeneous style Metaphrastes was also willing to downgrade (C. Rapp, “Byzantine Hagiographers as Antiquarians, Seventh to Tenth Centuries,” *ByzF* 21 [1995]: 5–7). Some stylistic downgrading and simplification of terminology has been detected in Nikephoros Ouranos's reworking of Emperor Leo VI's reflections on maritime warfare (Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 181–82). Desires to speak plainly by avoiding inflated language, to simplify, and to make complex material more comprehensible are visible in the preface to the manual of siege craft *Parangelmata poliorcetica* (Sullivan, *Siegecraft*, 28); such sentiments are also found in the prefaces of the statecraft manuals associated with Constantine Porphyrogenetos (e.g., *De administrando imperio*, ed. G. Moravcsik, trans. R. J. H. Jenkins, CFHB 1 [Washington, DC, 1967], 48; hereafter cited as *DAI*), as well as in the introduction to the *Taktika* of Leo VI, where the emperor

paraphrases but also updates and changes the *Strategikon of Maurice* to the same end. Contemporary Byzantine conceptions of clarity and plain speaking may not, of course, be congruent with modern aesthetics. Constantine Porphyrogenetos's statements about an unadorned style have been interpreted as an apology for vulgar and unclassical Greek rather than an aspiration to plain speaking (Ševčenko, “Re-reading Constantine Porphyrogenitus,” 182), and surprise has been expressed at the elevated register and complex prose contained in the *Parangelmata poliorcetica* (Sullivan, *Siegecraft*, 6). See G. L. Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric* (Thessalonica, 1973), 77–90, for Byzantine conceptions of clarity; some of his points are developed at greater length with regard to middle Byzantine military materials in C. Holmes, “The Rhetorical Structures of John Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historion*,” in *Rhetoric in Byzantium*, ed. E. Jeffreys (Aldershot, 2003), 197–98. For further discussion of the application of *metaphrasis* to Byzantine texts, esp. in the context of compilation, see I. Ševčenko, “Levels of Style in Byzantine Prose,” *JÖB* 31 (1981): 289–312; idem, “Some Additional Remarks to the Report on Levels of Style,” *JÖB* 32 (1982): 220–38.

9 Notable instances include the *Geoponica* and the *Hippiatrica* (Lemerle, *Humanisme byzantin*, 289–92; McCabe, *Horse Medicine*, esp. 260–62).

10 In the case of the *Praecepta militum*, the author seems familiar with the techniques and terminology of more antique military traditions; however, much of the actual content of the handbook seems to have been directly copied or abbreviated from two more or less contemporary texts: the *Syntaxis armatorum quadrata* and the *Sylloge tacticorum*, both of which date to ca. 950 (McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, 181–84). The vast *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos drew very substantially both on materials from late antiquity and from more recent texts including the *Taktika* of Leo VI (see below, 73). Leo VI's own *Taktika* represents a fusion of materials from late antiquity, esp. the *Strategikon of Maurice*, but also contains more contemporary personal observations, particularly about the relationship of war and faith in the context of the hostile encounter with Muslim Arabs (G. Dagron, “Byzance et le modèle islamique au Xe siècle à propos des constitutions tactiques de l'empereur Léon VI,” in *Comptes rendus de séances de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres* [Paris, 1983], 219–43). For the reuse of a late 9th-century military treatise by Katakylas, a contemporary of Leo VI, in the reign of Constantine Porphyrogenetos, see below, 66. Not all middle Byzantine military compilers were so open to recent literary production, however; see below for the *Naumachika* of Basil Lekapenos.

of some editors to utilize sources from outside Greek traditions, including Arabic texts produced for Islamic audiences?¹¹ Moreover, given the great variety in the genesis of the source materials that appear in compilations, should we be concerned about the rather wild manner in which compilers referenced the authorities they used? Some compilations, for example, make precise cross-references; others leave sources anonymous; annoyingly, some compilers claim in their prefaces to employ particular materials that, on later inspection, prove to have little direct connection to the compilation in question.¹² And finally, what are we to make of the remarkable variation in even the size of the audiences for compilations? While Constantine Porphyrogenetos famously addresses a very narrow audience of one (his son Romanos) in the prefaces to the *De administrando* and to the third of his three treatises on military campaigning, other tenth-century manuals make an appeal to a far broader readership and audience.¹³ Beyond the larger or smaller audiences

identified by compilers themselves, the record of manuscript survival also suggests that some compilations enjoyed a much wider reception over far longer periods of time than did others.¹⁴

There may be further grounds, moreover, for questioning the utility of the term *compilation*, not least because it reduces to a single category a series of literary productions that contemporary Byzantines may have identified in more plural and complex ways. Take, for example, the mid-tenth-century *Excerpta*, whose rationale was the reorganization of the testimonies of twenty-six historians into fifty-three “useful” thematic chapters (*hypotheseis*).¹⁵ The text that resulted from this process of selection and division was termed an *ekloge* in the preface to each of the separate thematic volumes of the *Excerpta*.¹⁶ This approach appears to differ substantially from another compilation method by which existing authorities were simply laid end to end, a process discernible in Nikephoros Ouranos’s military manual.¹⁷ And indeed, it seems clear that contemporaries were themselves able to distinguish between these basic techniques of compilation. Thus, once the pieces intended for any given volume of the *Excerpta* had been snipped out of their original textual contexts, they were laid out one by one into their new thematic home without further intervention on the part of the compiler. The assemblage *within* each thematic volume that resulted from this process was explicitly labeled “not quite *synopsis*, but more truly *oikeiosis*” by those who wrote the

11 See M. Mavroudi, *A Byzantine Book on Dream Interpretation: The Oneirocriticon of Achmet and Its Arabic Sources* (Leiden, 2002). Arabic terminology is also transmitted in some middle Byzantine military manuals (McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, 166). It is also clear that materials could move in the reverse direction. For Arabic translations and abbreviations of Leo VI's *Taktika*, see N. Serikoff, “Leo VI Arabus? An Unknown Fragment from the Arabic Translation of Leo VI's *Taktika*,” *Acta Orientalia Vilnensia* 4 (2003): 112–18; Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 645–66. I am grateful to Meredith Riedel of Exeter College, Oxford, for references to the Arabic rendering of Leo's text.

12 Careful source identification is typical of the *Excerpta* (Flusin, “Les *Excerpta* constantiniens” [n. 5 above], 539–55); recension M of the *Hippiatrica* follows a similar pattern, although other middle Byzantine recensions of this text display more cavalier approaches (McCabe, *Horse Medicine*, 261–74). Another scientific manual identified with the court of Constantine Porphyrogenetos, the medical treatise of Theophanes Nonnos, does not identify its sources. In the *Geoponica* some sources are wrongly identified, probably because the 10th-century compiler elided the names of sources he found in the late antique compilation he reworked (Lemerle, *Humanisme byzantin*, 289–91). The tendency to name sources that were known only through intermediaries is also characteristic of western medieval compilations; see V. Law, *Grammar and Grammarians in the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1997), 175–77.

13 *DAI*, 44–48; Haldon, *Three Treatises* (n. 6 above), 94. The compiler of the *Geodesia*, a manual for those interested in measurements in the context of siege warfare, addresses a wide and mixed audience of experts, amateurs, students of geometry, and those new to mathematics (Sullivan, *Siegecraft* [n. 6 above], 116–68, 126). In his eulogy for Symeon Metaphrastes, Michael Psellos identifies a wide audience for the *Metaphrastic Menologion* (references in Høgel, *Symeon Metaphrastes* [n. 5 above], 155–56).

14 The large numbers of manuscripts of the *Geoponica*, *Hippiatrica*, and *Metaphrastic Menologion* can be compared with the single manuscripts of the *DAI* and the *De thematibus*, the survival of only a few sections of the *Excerpta*, and the two representatives of the *De cer.* (Lemerle, *Humanisme byzantin*, 292; McCabe, *Horse Medicine*, 258–96 [both n. 6 above]; Høgel, *Symeon Metaphrastes*, 11, 150–56; Flusin, “Les *Excerpta* constantiniens,” 548–52 [both n. 5 above]). On the two manuscripts of the *De cer.*, see C. A. Mango and I. Ševčenko, “A New Manuscript of the *De Cerimoniis*,” *DOP* 14 (1960): 247–49; see also below.

15 See the two prefaces that survive from the extant volumes of the *Excerpta*: *De Legationibus Romanorum ad Gentes*, ed. C. de Boor, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1903), 1:2 (lines 6–7); *De virtutibus et vitiis*, ed. T. Büttner-Wobst, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1906–10), 1:2 (lines 11–13); Lemerle, *Humanisme byzantin*, 281–87; Flusin, “Les *Excerpta* constantiniens,” 538–39.

16 *De legationibus*, 1:2 (line 2); *De virtutibus*, 1:2 (line 9); Lemerle, *Humanisme byzantin*, 281–82.

17 A. Dain, *La ‘Tactique’ de Nicéphore Ouranos* (Paris, 1937), 19–37.

prefaces to the volumes of the *Excerpta*. Both synopsis and oikiosis seem to stand in contrast to the selection and extraction method, *ekloge*, by which the materials for each thematic chapter were originally chosen.¹⁸

Given the distinctions made in the *Excerpta*, should we refrain from further comment about the composition, content, and purpose of such literature until the precise terminology associated with compilation literature has been more fully scrutinized? Moreover, should the very precise manner in which the duties and responsibilities of authors, commentators, compilers, and copyists were later to be identified in medieval western Europe give us pause?¹⁹ Both are valid questions. However, perhaps we should not be too reluctant to move forward with our own analytical category of compilation literature. A recent and very exhaustive study of one particular late antique and middle Byzantine compilation tradition has, after all, cautioned against trying to overschematize this form of literary endeavor in accordance with the descriptive labels provided by contemporaries. In her work on late antique veterinary science, Anne McCabe has observed how inconsistently genre labels were applied by compilers, but also has noted the degree to which many compilations, including those beyond her immediate concern of animal medicine, share striking compositional methodologies. So striking, indeed, does she find the commonalities that she has been willing to apply her own more universal designation of “amalgamation” to such texts.²⁰ That some of the texts studied by McCabe share common compositional techniques is, of course, an idea that has been explored before, not least by Paul Lemerle in *Le premier humanisme byzantin*. McCabe herself

develops this line of thinking most precisely in her own work by looking at parallels in composition between the *Hippiatrica* and some Byzantine legal texts, especially Justinian’s *Digest*. Other marked parallels have also been noted by Bernard Flusin between another Byzantine legal text—the *Procheiron* of Leo VI—and the *Excerpta* of Constantine VII.²¹ Recent comparative analysis, therefore, seems to suggest that in attempting to define the category of compilation literature, it may be more useful to think in terms of a group of texts that shared a series of basic compositional characteristics than to rely on contemporary terminology.

Such shared characteristics quite often begin in the *prooimion* to a given compilation—above all, its explicit references to the practical “use” of what is to come in the main body of the text. Thus, the preface to the *Excerpta* notes the process by which Constantine Porphyrogenetos ordered books of every kind to be gathered together, broken up, and then reconstituted as “of use to all.” The tenth-century editor of the *Geoponica* refers to his text in identical terms.²² The compiler of the Phokas-related military manual *De velitatione* suggests he has undertaken his task so that the “useful knowledge” should not be blotted out by the passage of time.²³ Also visible in the preface may be the trope of the inseparability of writing and experience. In the introductory comments to his materials on maritime warfare, Leo VI claims that his text combines what little he has managed to glean from existing manuals and the experiences of his naval generals; its purpose is to provide those who are about to embark on naval warfare some sort of starting point.²⁴ Similarly, when he addresses his son Romanos in the preface to the *De administrando*, Constantine VII asserts that studying this text will enable his heir to amass experience.²⁵ Another telltale trope from prefaces to compilation literature is that of “order from disorder.” This slogan may refer to textual harmony: in other words,

18 *De legationibus*, 1:2 (lines 8–12); *De virtutibus*, 1:2 (lines 14–18); cf. Lemerle, *Humanisme byzantin*, 281–82; Flusin, “Les *Excerpta* constantiniens,” 538–39. Interesting parallels are visible between the methods of composition used in the *Excerpta* and those that have been detected in the 11th-century *Synagoge* of Paul, the founder and *begoumenos* of the Evergetis monastery, by J. Wortley, “The Model and Form of the *Synagoge*,” in *Work and Worship at the Theotokos Evergetis*, ed. M. Mullett and A. Kirby, BBT 6.2 (Belfast, 1997), 166–77.

19 For the careful subdivisions between these categories by St. Bonaventure in the 13th century, see M. Parkes, “The Influence of the Concepts of *Ordinatio* and *Compilatio* on the Development of the Book,” in *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays Presented to Richard William Hunt*, ed. J. J. C. Alexander and M. T. Gibson (Oxford, 1976), 115–41.

20 McCabe, *Horse Medicine* (n. 6 above), 60–65.

21 Lemerle, *Humanisme byzantin*, esp. chap. 10; McCabe, *Horse Medicine*, 63–64; Flusin, “Les *Excerpta* constantiniens,” 556–57.

22 The key term here is *κοινωφέλης*: *De legationibus*, 1:1 (line 24); *De virtutibus*, 1:2 (lines 1–2); for the reference to the *Geoponica*, see Lemerle, *Humanisme byzantin*, 289.

23 Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (n. 6 above), 146.

24 Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 484; Dennis, *Taktika*, 502–3 (both n. 6 above).

25 *DAI*, 44.

the compiler's task is to bring harmony to a host of conflicting authorities, which in their noisy competition have led to disarray and confusion.²⁶ But the relationship of compilation text to order can also reflect more far-reaching ambitions. In the preface to the *De cerimoniis*, Constantine VII justifies his bringing together materials about ceremonies from all sorts of documents on the grounds that *taxis* makes imperial glory more magnificent in the eyes of foreigners and subjects.²⁷ Some prefaces also express a desire to make the materials contained within the compilation comprehensible, unlike the difficulty and allusiveness of existing productions. Thus, in the *prooimia* to two mid-tenth-century manuals on siege warfare, the *Parangelmata poliorcetica* and the *Geodesia*, the compiler identifies his role as simplifying existing writers whose works are too difficult to grasp and providing an account that is far easier to understand; "grasp" is also an objective identified in the preface to the *De cerimoniis*.²⁸

Of course, the principles outlined in the preface to a compilation may not always be consistently adhered to in the text that follows. As has frequently been observed, compilations of the middle Byzantine period often resemble little more than dossiers of all-but-untouched original materials onto which a rather pompous and vacuous preface has been slapped by the compiler.²⁹ Even where more intervention on the part of the compiler is visible in the main text, the injunctions of the preface may not always play out in the manner that a modern audience expects. In the case of military manuals whose compilers promise to make their materials less obscure, elements of "high style" prose may still survive.³⁰ More to the point, as already noted, the organization of materials may vary quite considerably within the main body of a compilation text. Yet despite some differences, compilations, whether thematic or linear in nature, tend to exhibit several comparable traits. One is the regularity of verbatim copying from underlying

authorities.³¹ Also conspicuous is the frequency with which one basic underlying source (which quite frequently is itself an earlier compilation text) is used as the spine of the new compilation; onto this central element, additional authorities or indeed very brief personal comments by the compiler are often grafted.³²

Before moving on to discuss the relationship between compilation literature and a spectrum of political contexts, I would like to summarize those features that make compilation an identifiable body of literature. For me, compilations are texts in which materials of a roughly common theme have been collected and reproduced through a variety of techniques. The source materials used by compilers may be of antique pedigree or of more recent vintage; the compilations that make use of such materials may acknowledge their sources, or may not; sometimes the sources they claim are not the ones they actually use. Where prefaces are provided or survive, discourses of use, experience, and order are often conspicuous. Having established some approximate parameters for the field of compilation literature, especially for those handbooks concerned with statecraft and military matters in the tenth to early eleventh centuries, I now move on to the question of the purpose of these productions and their interconnection with Byzantine politics. In what ways exactly were texts that so often invoked the trope of "use" useful?

Compilations as Educative Tools and Primers

One way of approaching the use of compilations is to take literally statements that compilers make about their intentions, above all their didactic claims. Thus, we should accept the emperor's assertion in the *De administrando* that he wishes to teach his son Romanos in plain and straightforward prose the rudiments of government so that the young co-emperor may "lay hold skilfully

26 *De legationibus*, 1:1 (lines 12–18); *De virtutibus*, 1:1 (lines 11–17); Lemerle, *Humanisme byzantin*, 281–82; and see below, 63.

27 *De cer.*, 1:1–3.

28 Sullivan, *Siegecraft* (n. 6 above), 26, 116; Lemerle, *Humanisme byzantin*, 276; for "grasp" (κατάληψις), see *De cer.*, 1:4 (line 17); also see below, 64.

29 Lemerle, *Humanisme byzantin*, 274. For the relationship between compilations and dossiers, see esp. Featherstone, "Preliminary Remarks," 457–78.

30 Sullivan, *Siegecraft*, 6.

31 In the case of the *Excerpta*, see Lemerle, *Humanisme byzantin*, 285; Flusin, "Les *Excerpta* constantiniens" (n. 5 above), 542–43. Note the very close paraphrasing of Leo VI's constitutions on naval warfare by Nikephoros Ouranos; an instance of word-for-word copying appears in the preface (Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 181–82, 484, 572).

32 For this general observation, see McCabe, *Horse Medicine*, 263, esp. n. 27; in connection with siege warfare manuals, see also Sullivan, *Siegecraft*, 5–6, 28–30; and hagiographical collections, Høgel, *Symeon Metaphrastes* (n. 5 above), 100–101.

upon the helm of rule.”³³ In the case of the preface to the *Parangelmata poliorcetica*, a siege warfare manual from the tenth century, we should take seriously the compiler’s introductory statement that he has collected materials and presented them in straightforward prose accompanied by illustrations so that “siege machines can be both carpentered and constructed by anyone,” and so that generals in the field may have a convenient list of such instruments.³⁴ While these different texts explicitly address audiences of different sizes, one could argue that the primary receivers of such texts were educated in Constantinople and associated closely with imperial rule and administration. In this context compilations could be seen as primers and exemplars, designed to transmit the rudiments of useful knowledge and experience to those figures in Byzantine government charged with maintaining the security and stability of the state. Such a reading makes sense not just at a general level: specific examples also support the same conclusion. In the case of many of the military manuals produced in the mid- to late tenth century, the sponsors, and perhaps even the actual compilers, were often actively involved in the territorial expansion of the Byzantine Empire. Among such figures were Basil Lekapenos, the illegitimate son of Emperor Romanos I and *parakoimomenos* to Constantine VII; the general and later emperor Nikephoros Phokas; and Nikephoros Ouranos, who achieved fame as an imperial confidant, experienced diplomat, senior general, and military administrator during the reign of Basil II.³⁵ But

perhaps the most explicit statement about the usefulness of books for those in positions of imperial government comes from the eleventh-century observer of military and political affairs Kekaumenos, who recommends to generals that they read widely, including military handbooks.³⁶

Yet despite the evident appeal of this notion that compilations were useful models for those charged with imperial government, there are powerful arguments against such a reading. Some modern scholars have argued that the ubiquity of obsolete material in many compilations made them of little practical use to those actively involved in day-to-day government; of course, others have been willing to detect glimpses of contemporary practices amid long passages of redundant prose from the Roman, late antique, and earlier Byzantine worlds. But it is striking that a very recent and exhaustive examination of one subset of the military manuals (those dealing with naval warfare) casts doubt on the practicability of almost all of the techniques described by Byzantine martial theorists. According to this interpretation, many of these military compilations are better seen as exercises in antiquarianism or as part of a literary game among highly educated courtiers.³⁷ More significant, even some Byzantine writers themselves appear to agree that materials included in compilations could be out of date. Nikephoros Ouranos acknowledged that the vast majority of siege warfare techniques described in military manuals had no contemporary relevance; and the preface to *De velitatione* states that a

33 *DAI*, 44–48; quotation, 45.

34 Sullivan, *Siegecraft*, 26–34; quotation, 29.

35 For Basil, see below, 70–72. Nikephoros is most closely associated with the *Praecepta militum* but is also believed to have influenced other military compilations, including the *De velitatione*, in their early stages of composition; see McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth* (n. 6 above), 12–78, 171–81; G. Dagron and H. Mihăescu, *Le Traité sur la guérilla (De velitatione) de l’empereur Nicéphore Phocas* (Paris, 1986); see also below, 72–73. For Nikephoros’s military *taktika*, see, in the first instance, E. McGeer, “Tradition and Reality in the *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos,” *DOP* 45 (1991): 129–40; idem, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth*, 74–167. Nikephoros was also a close associate of another high-profile compiler associated with imperial circles, Symeon Metaphrastes. Indeed, Ouranos wrote a eulogy on the occasion of Symeon’s death explaining how each of the two used to review the other’s literary productions. While the exact nature of this literary association is left unclear by Ouranos, we know that he shared his friend’s fondness for rewriting and updating saints’ lives (Høgel, *Symeon Metaphrastes*, 64–65); for the literary activities of the court of Basil II, see also B. Crostini, “Emperor Basil II’s Cultural Life,” *Byzantion* 64 (1996): 53–80; also see below, 68.

36 Kekaumenos, *Consilia et Narrationes: Cecaumeni Consilia et Narrationes*, ed. and trans. G. Litavrin (Moscow, 1972), 19.23ff.; see also C. Roueché, “The Literary Background of Kekaumenos,” in *Literacy, Education and Manuscript Transmission in Byzantium and Beyond*, ed. C. Holmes and J. Waring (Leiden, 2002), 117–23.

37 For recent skepticism with regard to military manuals, see Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, esp. 1–6, 175–87, 445–54. Others have been readier to see contemporary practices and attitudes toward warfare amid otherwise obsolete materials: e.g., J. A. de Foucault, “Douze chapitres inédits de la ‘Tactique’ de Nicéphore Ouranos,” *TM* 5 (1973): 281–310; Dagron and Mihăescu, *Le Traité sur la guérilla*, 139–60; McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth*, passim; Sullivan, *Siegecraft*, 15–21; and idem, “Byzantine Instructional Manual,” 144–45. For further discussion of practical use or antiquarianism in the case of the military interests of Leo VI, see S. Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI (886–912): Politics and People* (Leiden, 1997), 170–71. The question of practical use has arisen in discussions of other compilation texts, including the late antique and middle Byzantine versions of the *Hippiatrica*; see McCabe, *Horse Medicine*, 61–63, 298–300.

great number of the guerrilla warfare tactics about to be described have, in fact, recently fallen into abeyance.³⁸

Such acknowledgments of redundancy are troubling: if Byzantine writers themselves cast doubt on the contemporary relevance of the materials they transmit, then in what ways can such texts be said to be “useful”? Is this question of utility even worth pursuing, or should we fall back on the explanation that such productions were almost always connected to antiquarian interests shared by a small number of court officials? In what follows I argue that though the content of much compilation literature could rarely be practically applied, it would be wrong to see it purely as a manifestation of antiquarianism. Instead, such literature was of central use to contemporary society insofar as it was a key tool in the search for political authority. That is to say, while much material in the compilation literature under scrutiny here deals with battles long forgotten or siege machinery long abandoned, such texts nonetheless represented an established and well-respected bedrock of Byzantine written culture within which contemporary personalities, practices, and ideas could be represented and gain legitimacy.

Authority and Compilation Literature

To invoke “authority” may seem strange, given the anonymity of many compilers, their relative lack of explicit intervention in the materials they transmit, and their rather inconsistent attitude toward the status of their sources. Indeed, recent research into the *Metaphrastic Menologion* by Christian Høgel has drawn attention to some significant ambiguities in middle Byzantine attitudes toward textual authority. Important here is Høgel’s argument that Symeon Magistros and his team of collectors and revisers of saints’ lives tended to leave untouched biblical, patristic, and very early hagiographical texts whose original authors were well known, while reserving their editing and upgrading energies for materials by lesser or unknown writers. The implication of this interpretation is that contemporaries in middle Byzantium found some texts and writers far more authoritative than others. Yet, as Høgel himself argues, it was not impossible for a compilation text to aspire to and perhaps even achieve an authoritative position.

38 McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth*, 160–62; Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (n. 6 above), 146.

For as he goes on to demonstrate, Symeon’s collecting and upgrading activities had themselves become so renowned that by the middle of the eleventh century they reached something close to canonical status. Not only had his ten-volume collection of hagiographical materials been issued on imperial command, but Symeon himself was widely identified as Metaphrastes, so-called because of the literary technique of rewriting that had made his collection distinctive and, in Høgel’s terms, authoritative.³⁹ Symeon is, perhaps, an extreme example of an authoritative compiler; most compilers remain anonymous or are known to us only through accidental comment or by mistaken attribution.⁴⁰ And of course, recognition of the authority of a compiler or of a compilation never deterred further intervention on the part of other Byzantine writers.⁴¹ But in some ways, *recopying* and *recasting* may have been the point. Whether or not the name of any given compiler was identified correctly, the frequency with which a text was reused, recopied, and recast may have led to its being regarded as authoritative; and if texts themselves gained authority through such processes, then perhaps these processes gave compilation itself a certain status as an activity.⁴² More important still, if compilation was an authoritative activity, then associating with or engaging in compilation processes could also become a means to acquiring personal authority.

Any argument that tries to draw a connection between authority and compilation needs to pay close attention to how the various processes of compilation took place (including copying, rearranging, inserting new material, and adding prefaces). It is necessary to consider how extensively those who wished to gain authority by association with compilation actually handled the underlying texts. How important was the gesture of taking hold of a body of materials from the past and being seen to manipulate them? Was it key that intervention operate at a relatively high level, with

39 Høgel, *Symeon Metaphrastes* (n. 5 above), 46–50, 135–49.

40 Lemerle, *Humanisme byzantin* (n. 6 above), 289–90.

41 The *Taktika* of Leo VI was subjected to changes very shortly after being assembled and was regularly reused by compilers of military manuals throughout the 10th century; see A. Dain, “Inventaire raisonné des cent manuscrits des ‘Constitutions tactiques’ de Léon le Sage,” *Scriptorium* 1 (1946–47): 40–45; Dennis, *Taktika* (n. 6 above), ix–xiii; also see below, 76.

42 For the relationship between textual authority and compilation, see McCabe, *Horse Medicine*, 63.

substantial reordering or stylistic upgrading, as for example in the cases of the *Excerpta* and *Metaphrastic Menologion*? Or was it enough simply to add a familiar-sounding preface to a preexisting compilation or even to a heterogeneous miscellany of materials? How seriously should readers take any self-effacing statement in the preface that played down the role undertaken by the compiler, describing it as little more than that of reconciler and bringer of order? Study of such statements in the compilation traditions of the late medieval west has suggested that such topoi could act as a veil behind which compilers could actively reorganize, reinterpret, and strengthen existing materials; by the process of association with an existing authority, modifications and even innovations stood a much greater chance of gaining credence.⁴³ That similar options were available to compilers in Byzantium must remain a possibility worth considering, given the appearance of modesty topoi in the introductions to Byzantine compilations.⁴⁴ Another equally important “how” question concerns the small alterations and personal interjections found in many compilations. Are such light retouchings disappointingly infrequent and entirely insignificant, as is sometimes argued? Or were small changes of much greater significance, as scholars working in the field of Byzantine art history have argued in the context of amendments made during the copying and transmission of visual culture?⁴⁵

One obvious political agent within Byzantium with an interest in enhancing his authority through association with the production of compilation literature was clearly the emperor himself. And, indeed, just such a case has frequently been made for one

tenth-century emperor in particular, Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, relying mainly on the comments by the author of the sixth book of Theophanes Continuatus that Constantine regarded the restoration of knowledge, rational arts, and sciences as integral to the well-being of the state.⁴⁶ According to this line of thinking, a politically inspired desire to revive and protect the state can be seen not only in those compilations that explicitly name Constantine as the initiator of the collections of useful materials (as in the *De administrando*, *De cerimoniis*, and *Excerpta*) but also in a number of other texts that exhibit features clearly linking them to imperial circles. Such features include eulogistic references contained within the texts themselves to the emperor and his sponsorship of learning, as found in the *Geoponica* and the *Bestiary*, or assumed provenance from an imperial scriptorium, as ascribed to one recension of the *Hippiatrica*, the medical treatise of Theophanes Nonnos, and the collection of military materials represented by the manuscript Laurentius 55, 4.⁴⁷ Constantine’s decision to associate himself with the revival of learning, particularly in the shape of compilation literature, can be interpreted as conforming with a Byzantine tradition that saw it as the duty of the emperor to promote the arts of war and peace. Such ideas of imperial rule dated from late antiquity, if not earlier, but they had also been practiced more recently—above all by Leo VI, Constantine’s father, who had been an energetic sponsor of compilations of several kinds, including a legal handbook (the *Procheiron*) as well as his military writings.⁴⁸

Nonetheless, some scholars have been struck by the distance between the rhetoric of Constantine’s government-by-learning and its manifestation in texts. Paul Lemerle, for example, came close to despair at the lack of original material or interpretation

43 A. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1984), 191–210.

44 McCabe, *Horse Medicine*, 213; for a more skeptical approach to modesty topoi in the 10th century see Ševčenko, “Re-reading Constantine Porphyrogenitus” (n. 6 above), 178.

45 On the relatively minor nature of many changes and interventions, particularly in the main texts outside the *prooimia*, see Lemerle, *Humanisme byzantin*, 274; Høgel, *Symeon Metaphrastes*, 91–93; Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 181–82. That interventions, however minor, should be taken more seriously by modern scholars was suggested in the context of military manuals by A. Dain, “Les stratégistes byzantins,” *TM* 2 (1967): 359. For the significance of even the most minor alterations in art historical contexts, see J. Lowden, “Visual Knowledge,” in Holmes and Waring, *Literacy, Education and Manuscript Transmission* (n. 36 above), 59–80.

46 Theophanes Continuatus, ed. I. Bekker, CSHB [33] (Bonn, 1838), 445–46.

47 J. Irigoin, “Pour une étude des centres de copie byzantins,” *Scriptorium* 12 (1958): 208–27; 13 (1959): 177–209; Lemerle, *Humanisme byzantin*, esp. chap. 10; McCabe, *Horse Medicine*, 269–75, esp. for recension B of the *Hippiatrica*.

48 J. Shepard, “Byzantium Expanding, 944–1025,” in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, ed. T. Reuter (Cambridge, 1999), 3:586–87; see below, 76, 78, for more on the *Taktika* of Leo, including his thoughts on naval warfare. See also G. Strano, “Potere imperiale e γένη aristocratici a Bisanzio durante il regno di Leone VI,” *Bizantinistica* 4 (2002): 78–99.

in the tenth-century compilations associated with Constantine. Lemerle saw works like the *Geoponica* as representing little more than the reissue of a late antique manual with a new tenth-century preface; even such texts as the *De administrando*, *De ceremoniis*, and *De thematibus*, which contain materials datable to periods after late antiquity, were in effect hastily assembled dossiers to which Constantine had added highly generalized introductory statements. For Lemerle the principal significance of Constantine's production was the vision of imperial glory and taxis presented in the prefaces to these texts.⁴⁹ This essentially negative view of Constantine's contribution to Byzantine learning and by extension politics has been challenged in recent years, as some have attempted to rehabilitate the historical sensitivities of those working on the *Excerpta* project—an enterprise that Lemerle had labeled *anti-histoire*.⁵⁰ The composition and transmission of at least one of the technical manuals associated with Constantine, the *Hippiatrica*, have now been fully worked out;⁵¹ the nature of the materials in the *De ceremoniis* and the *De administrando* (and thus the degree to which they make thematic sense) is now much better understood than when Lemerle wrote.⁵² Yet despite his palpable disappointment with the oeuvre of Constantine, Lemerle's comments about the significance of the mid- to late tenth-century encyclopedias do point toward what may be the most important context for the production of these texts: a concern not so much for restoring the Byzantine state as for bolstering of the legitimacy of an emperor whose own hold on power was extremely tenuous, and who was extremely reliant on the support of other powerful agents.

49 Lemerle, *Humanisme byzantin*, chap. 10.

50 Flusin, "Les *Excerpta* constantiniens" (n. 5 above), passim.

51 McCabe, *Horse Medicine*, passim.

52 On the *De administrando*, see K. Belke and P. Soustal, *Die Byzantiner und ihre Nachbarn: Die De Administrando Imperio genannte Lehrschrift des Kaisers Konstantinos Porphyrogenetos für seinen Sohn Romanos* (Vienna, 1995); Sode, "Untersuchungen zu *De Administrando Imperio*" (n. 6 above); J. Howard-Johnston, "The *De Administrando Imperio*: A Re-examination of the Text and a Re-evaluation of Its Evidence about the Rus," in *Les Centres proto-urbains russes entre Scandinavie, Byzance et Orient: Actes du Colloque 1997*, ed. M. Kazanski, A. Nersessian, and C. Zuckerman (Paris, 2000), 301–36. On the *De cer.*, see the entirety of *TM* 13 (2000); Featherstone, "Preliminary Remarks"; idem, "Further Remarks" (both n. 6 above).

That Constantine Porphyrogenetos faced immense political challenges from within Byzantium during the course of his adult reign, especially at its outset in the mid-940s, is made clear by a variety of tenth-century sources. For despite inheriting the imperial mantle as a boy from his father Leo in 912, for the next thirty-three years he was subject to the tutelage of other more senior political figures: first of all, his uncle the emperor Alexander; then the regents, including the Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos and his mother Zoe; and lastly, and most famously of all, his father-in-law, the emperor Romanos Lekapenos.⁵³ For much of the first half of the tenth century, therefore, Constantine was a shadowy figure whose rise to sole imperial rule in 944–45 came about only because he was able to exploit the turmoil accompanying the deposition of Romanos I. The exact chronology of how Romanos was overthrown by his sons Stephen and Constantine and the details of how, in turn, Constantine VII took advantage of that coup to deprive the Lekapenos sons of imperial authority are murky. However, surviving historiographical accounts agree that Constantine's regime relied very extensively on his brother-in-law Basil Lekapenos, the parakoimomenos and illegitimate son of the emperor Romanos, as well as on the military muscle of the Phokas family. It is clear that at least for the early years of his reign, Constantine remained vulnerable to plots from those members of the Lekapenos party who had been ousted.⁵⁴

As is well known, Constantine's response to assuming rule as an adult was to embark on a wide-ranging propaganda initiative. An important part of that initiative was the very explicit promotion of his own imperial family—most visibly in the hagiographical account of the life of the founder of his dynasty, his grandfather Basil I, which Constantine either wrote

53 For Constantine's early life, see *Symeonis magistri et logothetae Chronicon*, ed. S. Wahlgren, CFHB 44 (Berlin, 2006), 297–340; *Ioannis Skylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. I. Thurn, CFHB 5 (Berlin, 1973), 197–232.

54 For the coups that brought Constantine to sole power and continuing threats from the Lekapenos family, see *Symeonis magistri et logothetae Chronicon*, 339–43; *Theophanes Continuatus*, 436–69; Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 320–38. Note also the reference in chapter 44 of book 2 of the *De cer.* to the naval surveillance placed on Rhodes as part of the arrangements for keeping the exiled Stephen Lekapenos under guard during the Cretan expedition of 949; J. Haldon, "Theory and Practice in Tenth-Century Military Administration," *TM* 13 (2000): 218–19.

himself or, as seems more likely, sponsored.⁵⁵ Another element of his strategy was to present himself as the energetic governor of the state. This was achieved partly by direct action—for instance, sending out and receiving embassies from neighboring peoples—but also by issuing such compilations as the *De administrando* and *De cerimoniis*. Indeed, one can make a powerful argument that action and text were in this sense complementary and even coterminous. It is, for instance, from one of those sections of the *De cerimoniis* which can be dated to Constantine's own reign that we learn about many of the embassies that the emperor received from neighboring peoples, including those from Cordoba, Tarsos, and the Rus'. Jeffrey Featherstone has recently argued that these notices about recent embassies were added during the later years of Constantine's hegemony onto a core text about imperial ceremonial that had been put together somewhat earlier in the reign from various late antique and early Byzantine source materials.⁵⁶ If this is so, then Constantine appears to have been engaged in a process of self-authentication: by grafting his own actions onto materials that by virtue of their antiquity were already authoritative, he sought to gain greater legitimacy for himself.

That compilation texts could in this way assist in promoting the emperor's legitimacy is visible elsewhere, too. For while many of the materials in those manuals most closely associated with Constantine refer to much earlier periods of the Byzantine or late antique past, it is particularly striking that Constantine or his compilers inserted brief phrases or passages magnifying the name and deeds of the emperor himself and

his dynasty into these apparently obsolete materials. Conspicuous among these interjections are hyperbolic references in the *De administrando* and the *De thematibus* to the deeds of Constantine's grandfather Basil I in the Adriatic region and southern Italy.⁵⁷ Just as important were interpolations that could damage the reputation of his rivals, not least the previous emperor Romanos Lekapenos, about whom no fewer than three damaging references appear in the *De administrando*.⁵⁸ But the significant point here is not merely the praise for Basil or the denigration of Romanos; nor is it that mid-tenth-century compilations concerned with imperial governance contain, somewhat bizarrely to modern eyes, material from periods that predate Constantine's own lifetime. Instead, what should be emphasized is that earlier texts within the compilation and the activity of compilation itself were very useful means of legitimizing the ancestry of a mid-tenth-century emperor and his claims to imperial power.

Constantine's decision to strengthen his own political position by drawing on the authority of important figures from the past and on authoritative textual traditions is nowhere more visible than in his handling of military matters. That Constantine had a substantial interest in military matters is now well documented. The collection of military materials in manuscript Laurentius 55, 4 points in this direction.⁵⁹ More directly attributable to Constantine are three texts connected to campaigning, known as the "Three Military Treatises," which are to be found in the same Leipzig manuscript as the principal witness to the *De*

55 For further discussion of the relationship of Constantine to the *Vita Basili*, see Ševčenko, "Re-reading Constantine Porphyrogenitus" (n. 6 above), 173 n. 14. See also discussion in Koutrakou, *La propaganda impériale* (n. 3 above), 78 n. 133, 120.

56 Featherstone, "Preliminary Remarks," 464–65, 474. For evidence from outside the *De cer.* for Constantine's diplomatic initiatives, see Liudprand of Cremona, "Antapodosis," book 6, in *The Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, trans. F. A. Wright (London, 1930); S. M. Stern, "An Embassy of the Byzantine Emperor to the Fatimid Caliph al-Mu'izz," *Byzantion* 20 (1950): 239–58; C. Zuckerman, "Le Voyage d'Olga et la première ambassade espagnole à Constantinople en 946," *TM* 13 (2000): 647–72. The dating of relationships with Rus' during Constantine's reign is particularly controversial. For an assessment of the various modern scholarly positions, see S. Franklin and J. Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus, 750–1200* (Cambridge, 1996), 133–38; see most recently J. Featherstone, "Olga's Visit to Constantinople in *De Cerimoniis*," *REB* 61 (2003): 241–51.

57 *DAI*, 124–34 (chap. 29), 146 (chap. 30); and *De thematibus*, ed. A. Pertusi (Vatican City, 1952), 96–98 (chaps. 10–11). For other interpolations that promote Constantine and his lineage, see *DAI*, 98 (chap. 22), 233–57 (chaps. 50–51); *De legationibus*, 1:1.

58 The most famous of these put-downs comes in *DAI*, chap. 13, when Constantine criticizes Romanos for allowing the marriage between a Byzantine princess and Peter, khan of the Bulgarians. However, there are two other references to events during the reign of Lekapenos that may have been included or expanded with the aim of embarrassing Constantine's imperial predecessor. The first refers to the emperor's bungled attempt to seize the valuable trading entrepôt of Ardanoutzin on the empire's eastern frontier, the second to Romanos's failed attempts to impose higher tributes on the Slavs of the Peloponnese (*DAI*, 218–22 [chap. 46], 232–34 [chap. 50]). On each occasion the text emphasizes Romanos's paranoid fear that he was about to bring revolt and disorder upon the empire.

59 Lemerle, *Humanisme byzantin*, 292–93; Haldon, *Three Treatises*, 51–53 (both n. 6 above).

cerimoniis. The first of these deals with imperial camps on route to the eastern frontier. The second is a late ninth- or early tenth-century account of the eastern campaigns of various emperors that was probably composed by Leo Katakylas in the reign of Leo VI. The third is a reworked version of the Katakylas treatise; it opens with a preface in the name of Constantine VII and concludes with a miscellany of materials drawn from outside the original Katakylas handbook, including descriptions of triumphal processions into Constantinople.⁶⁰ In addition to these textual collections and reworkings, we also know that Constantine composed two speeches to the army, although whether these speeches were made in person, were delivered via an intermediary speaker, or remained merely written documents and were never performed orally is not entirely clear.⁶¹

But though a flurry of research into the military materials associated with Constantine has made it easier to trace the image of an emperor with an active interest in military matters, establishing the significance of these texts remains somewhat trickier. Constantine's collection and editing of military texts could represent the interests of an armchair general who never campaigned but was still interested in strategies and tactics, an interpretation indeed recently ascribed to the military enthusiasms of his own father, Leo.⁶² At a slightly deeper level, Constantine's interests could be seen as an extension of his self-promotion as an emperor who took seriously the duties of sponsoring the arts of war and peace. But his motives may lie still deeper: perhaps Constantine's own political insecurity, his lack of authority, and the challenges that he faced to his rule from those who controlled the army made it particularly important for him to be seen as exercising mastery of military affairs. Given that Constantine had no personal military experience, might texts have provided a means for him to claim authority over the army?

60 Haldon, *Three Treatises*, passim; see Featherstone, "Preliminary Remarks" (n. 6 above), 462, on where the three treatises fit into the Leipzig manuscript of the *De cer*.

61 For the first speech, see H. Ahrweiler, "Un discours inédit de Constantin VII Porphyrogénète," *TM* 2 (1967): 393–404; for the second, R. Vári, "Zum historischen Exzerptenwerke des Konstantinos Porphyrogennetos," *BZ* 17 (1908): 75–85. Analysis and translation are offered by E. McGeer, "Two Military Orations of Constantine VII," in Nesbitt, *Byzantine Authors* (n. 6 above), 111–35.

62 Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ* (n. 6 above), 175–80.

Certainly this is an argument that makes sense contextually. The middle decades of the tenth century were marked by considerable military activity, particularly on Byzantium's eastern frontier, and by extensive changes in military tactics. Imperial armies were involved in both defensive and aggressive campaigns, undertaken above all against the highly energetic border emir Sayf ad Daula, the Hamdanid ruler of Aleppo. During the reign of Romanos Lekapenos these armies had been led by the general John Kourkouas; by the reign of Constantine, those at the vanguard of the campaigning were Bardas Phokas, the *domestikos* of the *scholai*, and his sons Nikephoros and Leo.⁶³ In this eastern warfare, traditional defensive tactics of guerrilla combat and ambushing remained important; at the same time, considerable evidence from military handbooks, contemporary legislation, and Arabic and Byzantine historiography suggests that the Byzantine field army underwent quite radical changes in financing, recruitment, and organization, particularly in the expansion of a heavily armed cavalry force and more specialized infantry troops.⁶⁴ Although the speed and significance of these changes may be debated, the army and its generals were more than ever central elements in Byzantine political society and the functioning of the state. Emperors of this period needed to find ways of managing this new political force or risk being unseated in a military coup d'état—especially rulers like Constantine, whom the generals had brought to power in the first place.⁶⁵

Support for the idea that Constantine's sole means of controlling the army was the use of written texts does not come from context alone. Constantine himself seems to say as much in his two orations to the army. Most striking in this regard is the second of his

63 There is a considerable literature on this subject: see, for instance, A. A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, 3 vols. (Brussels, 1935–68), 2.1:261–307; E. Honigsmann, *Die Ostgrenze des byzantinischen Reiches von 363 bis 1071, nach griechischen, arabischen, syrischen und armenischen Quellen* (Brussels, 1935), 72–102; M. Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium* (London, 1996), chap. 9; Shepard, "Byzantium Expanding" (n. 48 above), 586–95.

64 E. McGeer, "Infantry versus Cavalry: The Byzantine Response," *REB* 46 (1988): 135–45; idem, "The *Syntaxis Armatorum Quadrata*: A Tenth-Century Tactical Blueprint," *REB* 50 (1992): 129–99; idem, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth* (n. 6 above), 171–95; J. F. Haldon, "Military Service, Military Lands and the Status of Soldiers: Current Problems and Interpretations," *DOP* 47 (1993): 1–67; idem, "Theory and Practice" (n. 54 above), 235–340.

65 Shepard, "Byzantium Expanding," 591.

speeches, which was directed at the generals and which is usually dated to around 958. At its start, Constantine expresses his desire to “teach and instruct” his generals “in the art of war through my words (*syllabai*).”⁶⁶ Nor is this the only allusion to imperial attempts to use the written word to manage campaigning. The earlier speech suggests that soldiers’ rewards will depend on written testimony of their martial heroism. In this speech it appears that the army itself has some responsibility for keeping these records; by the time of the second speech, this is no longer the case: Constantine indicates that he has been forced to send his own officials to identify and reward merit.⁶⁷

In a recent article, Eric McGeer has made a compelling case for linking Constantine’s interest in military matters to the cultivation of a martial image, which the emperor hoped would help him achieve imperial legitimacy, above all in the eyes of the army. But in scrutinizing the corpus of military materials connected to Constantine, McGeer is also prepared to see the emperor going further than mere propaganda; he argues that we should take literally Constantine’s apparent desire, expressed in both speeches, to join his armies in the east. Important to McGeer’s argument are the textual connections that exist between Constantine’s speeches and references in the third of those three campaign treatises. There are, for instance, parallels between the exhortations to the troops found in Constantine’s speeches and salutations recorded in the treatises. McGeer also ties the language and content of the orations to the *Rhetorica militaris* of Syrianus Magistros, a text that Constantine recommended in the third treatise for inclusion in the imperial baggage train.⁶⁸ Moreover, McGeer interprets the focus on imperial campaigns and triumphs, particularly those of Basil I, in the third and final treatise as evidence for Constantine’s genuine desire to campaign in the east with his son Romanos and return to a huge civic welcome in Constantinople.⁶⁹

That Constantine had an interest in celebrating triumphs as well as in other military matters cannot, of course, be denied. We know, for instance, that he participated in victory ceremonies in Constantinople for generals who had enjoyed success against the Muslims.⁷⁰ However, I am not so sure that the different texts that reflect Constantine’s martial enthusiasms should be seen merely as the prelude to Constantine’s practical and personal management of the army on an actual campaign. Constantine’s age and lack of experience probably counted against the likelihood that any such plan existed. But more significantly, by the end of the reign any hope that Constantine might join his troops had clearly faded. Far from indicating that he is about to set out on campaign, his second and later speech is full of references to the emperor’s physical distance from military action, his mostly fruitless attempts to stay in contact with his troops, and, above all, the difficulty he had in exercising command through written means alone. He refers, for example, to the fact that he has corresponded frequently with his commanders, but has received little response.⁷¹ In this context Constantine’s protestation that he might be persuaded to take part in campaigns against the Hamdanids, if he can detect any enthusiasm on the part of the troops “to see in us and our son as your fellow cavalymen, infantrymen, and comrades-in-arms,” seems rather empty.⁷² The only way in which Constantine had been able to gain information about the operation of the army had been through his own placemen. As shown below, such meddling tactics were far more liable to alienate than to confirm the loyalty of the army.

In this context it seems more likely that by the end of his reign the only means by which Constantine could even appear to exercise authority over the empire’s military infrastructure were indirect, including the written word and ceremonies conducted in Constantinople itself. And, indeed, such conclusions are not mere speculation, for they are supported by dramatic evidence from the final three years of Constantine’s hegemony. At the core of this drama was a highly innovative

66 Vári, “Zum historischen Exzerptenwerke,” 78; McGeer, “Two Military Orations,” 127.

67 Ahrweiler, “Un discours,” 399; Vári, “Zum historischen Exzerptenwerke,” 79–80; McGeer, “Two Military Orations,” 120, 128–29.

68 McGeer, “Two Military Orations,” 114 nn. 19–20.

69 Ibid., 126–27.

70 *Theophanes Continuatus*, 452–53, 461–62; Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 241–42; McCormick, *Eternal Victory* (n. 3 above), 159–66.

71 Vári, “Zum historischen Exzerptenwerke,” 79; McGeer, “Two Military Orations,” 128.

72 Vári, “Zum historischen Exzerptenwerke,” 81; McGeer, “Two Military Orations,” 130.

victory ceremony held in Constantinople ca. 956 at which the emperor publicly trampled the neck of one of Sayf ad Daula's cousins, who had recently been taken captive by Leo Phokas in a skirmish on the eastern frontier. Clearly, with this trampling gesture (*calcatio*) the emperor humiliated his Muslim foe; but it also enabled Constantine to steal the thunder of a leading representative of the family of generals who had brought him to power in the mid-940s, and who were now actively trying to put the Byzantine army on a more aggressive footing on the eastern frontier. However, it is striking that in Constantine's attempts to buttress his own legitimacy, just as important as public performance was the making of a careful record of the ritual, which was then inserted into a dossier of materials attached to the *De cerimoniis*.⁷³

Yet despite the drama of the *calcatio* ritual and its painstaking commitment to the written record, it seems clear from Constantine's second oration to the army that many contemporaries chose to ignore his protestations of military competence. This point is important, because it raises questions about how many of Constantine's other efforts to legitimize his rule, including those expressed in compilation literature, may similarly have been met with apathy. It also warns us against assuming that inserting imperial achievements and ancestry into the authoritative literary tradition of compilation was necessarily a pathway to political success. But the uncertainty of this pathway did not deter other emperors from attempting to shore up their own authority by using compilation literature or from associating their own activities with previous imperial projects. The *Menologion* of Symeon Metaphrastes is a case in point, for this project to collect and rewrite a vast array of saints' lives appears to have had imperial sponsorship at some point in the mid- to later tenth century, although whether from

Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos or from one of his imperial successors is unclear. According to the chronology for the *Menologion*'s composition developed recently by Høgel, the most plausible imperial sponsor was Basil II, who offered the project support on his accession to the throne in 976 and then, somewhat unexpectedly, abandoned the initiative in 982.⁷⁴ If Høgel's chronology is correct, then at the start of his reign compilation may have been seen as a means to enhance Basil's grip on power at a time when he was facing two serious political challenges: he needed both to deal with an armed revolt in the east led by one of his most senior generals, Bardas Skleros, and to reassert his dynastic credentials following the reigns of Nikephoros Phokas and John Tzimiskēs.⁷⁵

Quite why Basil decided to pull the plug on the metaphrastic project is unclear. Perhaps Symeon was an associate of the parakoimomenos Basil Lekapenos, who gradually went out of Basil's favor in the early 980s; perhaps as the emperor sought in the same period to win power over the state from the parakoimomenos he recognized that governing the state required direct control of its key administrative levers (including the army), not simply the sponsorship of literary endeavors, particularly of the sort most recently associated with a nonmilitary figure like Constantine VII; perhaps he thought his money could be more effectively spent on other projects.⁷⁶ Whatever the explanation for its abandonment,

73 *De cer.*, 2:608–9 (chap. 19); this appears to be the same ceremony as that recorded by John Skylitzes, the historian (Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 241–42); for the striking differences between this victory parade and other 10th-century triumphs, see McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, 159–65; J. Shepard, "Constantine VII, Caucasian Openings and the Road to Aleppo," in *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium*, ed. A. Eastmond (Aldershot, 2001), 38–39. For further analysis of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos's martial propaganda, including his orations and triumphs, see M. L. D. Riedel, "Fighting the Good Fight: The *Taktika* of Leo VI and Its Influence on Byzantine Cultural Identity" (Ph.D. diss., Oxford, 2010).

74 Constantine's interest in collecting hagiographical materials is attested through his association with the collection of shortened saints' lives known as the *Synaxarion*; see Ševčenko, "Re-reading Constantine Porphyrogenitus" (n. 6 above), 188 n. 52. The biography of Symeon as developed by Høgel does not preclude Symeon's beginning his metaphrastic activities as early as the reign of Constantine. Nonetheless, Høgel (*Symeon Metaphrastes* [n. 5 above], 54–56, 61–87, 127–34) believes that the prime imperial mover was a later figure; for arguments in favor of Constantine VII's sponsorship, see Rapp, "Byzantine Hagiographers" (n. 8 above), 32.

75 On the rebellion of Skleros and the early years of Basil's reign, see C. Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire, 976–1025* (Oxford, 2005), 240–98, 450–61. Although Basil identified not only with the Macedonian side of his family but also with his Lekapenos heritage (through his grandmother Helena), the reigns of Nikephoros Phokas and John Tzimiskēs nonetheless interrupted the dynastic claims of both Lekapenoi and the Macedonians quite dramatically; see C. Holmes, "Constantinople in the Reign of Basil II," in *Byzantine Style, Religion and Civilisation: In Honour of Steven Runciman*, ed. E. Jeffreys (Cambridge, 2006), 330–36.

76 Basil's decision to abandon the project is attested by the Georgian hagiographer Eprem the Small; for the link to the demise

more striking is the *Menologion*'s apparent revival in the years after Basil's death, when the metaphrastic lives composed by Symeon appear to have been published as a collection endorsed by Constantine VIII (1025–28). Here, an interesting parallel emerges with the reign of Constantine VII. For just as Constantine VII had been a relatively weak and insecure emperor who sought to bolster his legitimacy by association with the authority of compilation, so did Constantine VIII adopt the same tactic to emerge from the shadow of his elder brother.⁷⁷ And indeed, there are other cases in which Basil II's immediate successors tried to enhance their own fragile legitimacy by concluding projects initiated and then abandoned by Basil. Constantine himself reserved for his own use the tomb in the Church of the Holy Apostles that Basil II had once intended as his burial place before deciding to be interred at the Hebdomon.⁷⁸ Moreover, Romanos III's attempts to conquer the eastern city of Aleppo can be interpreted as an effort to gain legitimacy by completing a Herculean task that even the great Basil had been unable to achieve.⁷⁹

of Basil the Parakoimomenos, see Høgel, *Symeon Metaphrastes*, 69–70. For the demise of Basil the Parakoimomenos, see Crostini, "Emperor Basil II's Cultural Life" (n. 35 above), passim; also Holmes, *Basil II*, 468–75. Crostini disputes the later allegations of Michael Psellos that Basil II was hostile to learning. That Basil himself did not entirely shun textual production as a means of promoting imperial authority is indicated by his own illustrated *Menologion* (which should not be confused with the *Menologion* of Symeon Metaphrastes) and a psalter, now in Venice, that includes an illumination of the emperor in the guise of a general from late antiquity; see I. Ševčenko, "The Illuminators of the Menologium of Basil II," *DOP* 16 (1962): 243–76; A. Cutler, "The Psalter of Basil II," in *Imagery and Ideology in Byzantine Art* (Aldershot, 1992), art. III.

77 Høgel, *Symeon Metaphrastes*, 132–33.

78 Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Antaki, *Histoire de Yahya ibn Sa'id d'Antioche*, ed. I. Kratchkovsky, trans. F. Michaeu and G. Troupeau, PO 47 (Turnhout, 1997), 481–83.

79 For Romanos's attack on Aleppo see Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 378–81; Michael Psellos, *Imperatorii di Bisanzio (Cronografia)*, ed. S. Impellizzeri, trans. S. Ronchey, 2 vols. (Rome, 1984), 1:78–86; Yahya, *Histoire*, PO 47, 493–501; W. Felix, *Byzanz und die islamische Welt im früheren 11. Jahrhundert* (Vienna, 1981), 82–89. Basil besieged Aleppo in 995 before deciding to withdraw his troops; he ignored the advice of his brother Constantine to take the city, preferring to renew an existing tribute agreement; see Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Antaki, *Histoire de Yahya-ibn-Sa'id d'Antioche, continuateur de Sa'id-ibn-Bitriq*, ed. and trans. I. Kratchkovsky and A. Vasiliev, PO 23 (1932), 442; W. A. Farag, "The Aleppo Question: A Byzantine-Fatimid Conflict of Interest in Northern Syria in the Later Tenth Century," *BMGS* 14 (1990): 53.

Nor are imperial attempts to enhance the authoritative potential of previous imperial projects, above all compilation literature, limited to the tenth and early eleventh centuries. The Komnenoi were also exponents of this strategy—notably Alexios Komnenos, who utilized compilation in the first half of his reign to help him put an extremely precarious regime on more solid foundations. Particularly striking in this regard was the emperor's effort to fuse imperial authority, compilation, and religious orthodoxy.⁸⁰ His desire to do so was most evident in the commissioning of Euthymios Zigabenos's *Dogmatic Panoply*, which, as Anna Komnene relates, was an imperially sponsored project to collect authoritative accounts about earlier heresies and their repudiations by the holy fathers. More to the point, Zigabenos was detailed to include within his collection the new heresy of Bogomilism, against which Alexios took action in the show trial and execution of Basil the Bogomil.⁸¹ This is another instance of an emperor who sought to achieve recognition and enhance his reputation by inscribing his own activities in an authoritative compilation.

Compilation and Wider Political Culture

Compilation in the Service of Careerism

Thus far we have seen how compilation literature was mobilized by tenth- and eleventh-century emperors for the purposes of legitimation, although not necessarily always with complete success. Moreover, while imperially sponsored compilations might seek to convey a message of divinely sanctioned, eternal, and unchanging imperial authority, it is clear from surviving manuscripts that such texts were as likely as any others to undergo later amendments, updates, and amalgamations.⁸² But whether contemporaries were persuaded by imperial

80 D. Smythe, "Alexios I and the Heretics: The Account of Anna Komnene's Alexiad," in *Alexios I Komnenos*, ed. M. Mullett and D. Smythe, 2 vols., BBT 4.1 (Belfast, 1996), 1:235–44.

81 *Annae Comnenae Alexias*, ed. D. R. Reinsch and A. Kambylis, 2 vols., CFHB 40 (Berlin, 2001), 1:489; see also B. and J. Hamilton, *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World, c. 650–c. 1405* (Manchester, 1998), 175–206.

82 Revisions to the *Taktika* of Leo occurred very shortly after the text's original composition (Dennis, *Taktika*, ix–xiii; McCabe, *Horse Medicine* [n. 6 above], 277 n. 116); on the reshaping of the *De cer.* after the death of Constantine, see below, 71.

attempts to use compilation literature to enforce authority or instead disregarded the integrity of imperially commissioned collections may in the end not really matter. More significant than the success of imperial commissions in promoting a particular emperor's individual authority is the high degree to which enthusiasm for and acceptance of such literature extended into the body politic. Indeed, it was precisely because traditions of compilation were broadly shared and deeply embedded within elite social and political groups that this medium was such a useful tool for imperial exploitation. However, it is important to note that "enthusiasm for" and "acceptance of" compilation among the Byzantine political and social elite did not mean entirely passive reception. Certainly individuals with an interest in compilation may have read such texts, but they were also actively involved in composing and producing these works as well. To a large extent, production *was* reception in a culture where personal careers, policies, and ideas could be pursued through the medium of compilation. In what follows I suggest some ways in which not just the emperor but members of a broader political community used compilations to advance themselves personally, pursue rivalries, elaborate policy, and articulate ideas.

One tenth-century example of a high-profile individual using this genre of literary enterprise to climb and re-climb the greasy political pole seems to be Basil Lekapenos, parakoimomenos to Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos. As Brokkaar and others have shown, Basil's career after the death of Constantine was somewhat uneven. He was dismissed as parakoimomenos by Romanos II in favor of the eunuch Joseph Bringas, only to stage a comeback after that emperor's death when he backed the coup of Nikephoros Phokas. He then was rewarded with the title of *proedros*, which he seems to have kept during the reign of John Tzimiskes. It was only late in the first decade of Basil II's reign that he was eventually forced to resign. Aside from his role at the center of imperial administration, it is clear that Basil also took part in military campaigns, such as accompanying the young John Tzimiskes in his conquest of Samosata in 958.⁸³ In addition to building

up a vast network of clients during his many years of political hegemony, Basil was also a considerable patron of the written, visual, and material arts.⁸⁴ Among the artifacts of written culture associated with Basil is a collection of military materials, including the two speeches of Constantine Porphyrogennetos to the Byzantine army preserved in Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Manuscript B 119-supplement (Gr. 139). Also contained in this manuscript is a manual on maritime warfare, the *Naumachika syntachthenta para Basileiou*, which, according to its preface, was put together on the order of Basil himself.⁸⁵ In addition it has been argued that the *De cerimoniis* of Constantine Porphyrogennetos was substantially expanded and reworked under the orders of Basil Lekapenos, during the reign either of Nikephoros Phokas or of John Tzimiskes.⁸⁶

It is the reworking of the *De cerimoniis* that first hints at the degree to which Basil Lekapenos used compilation literature and the techniques associated with its production to support and legitimize his own political aspirations and achievements. For, as Jeffrey Featherstone has argued, new passages were added at two very significant points in the Leipzig manuscript of the *De cerimoniis*, the main witness to this compilation. They reflect Basil's simultaneous attempts both to legitimize the new regime, which came to power in 963 with Nikephoros Phokas, and to enhance his *own* personal political authority. In one passage, a section of twelve chapters (book 1, chapters 93–104), sixth-century material from Peter the Patrician on imperial ceremonial, acclamations, and coronations is deployed as a prelude to the contemporary account of the coronation of the recent usurper Nikephoros Phokas. What comes after these twelve chapters is even more striking: here, Basil seeks to legitimize his *own* political authority by inserting a chapter dedicated to the office of the *proedros*, which had been created by Phokas for Basil himself. Not only did Basil try to authorize himself by the insertion of this chapter, but he also sought to give gravitas and antiquity to his title, which in fact

83 For the career of Basil, see W. G. Brokkaar, "Basil Lacapenos: Byzantium in the Tenth Century," in *Studia Byzantina et Neohellenica Neerlandica, Byzantina Neerlandica*, ed. W. F. Bakker, A. F. Van Gemert, and W. J. Aerts (Leiden, 1972), 199–234; cf. A. Kaldellis, *The Argument of Psellos' Chronographia* (Leiden, 1999), 82–85.

84 Brokkaar, "Basil Lacapenos," 218–19; Crostini, "Emperor Basil II's Cultural Life" (n. 35 above), 59–64.

85 C. Mazzuchi, "Dagli anni di Basilio Parakimomenos (cod. Ambr. B 119 sup.)," *Aevum* 52 (1978): 267–318; Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ* (n. 6 above), 183–85, 521–31.

86 Featherstone, "Preliminary Remarks," esp. 478–79; Featherstone refines his position in "Further Remarks," 113–21 (both n. 6 above).

represented an entirely new development in Byzantine ceremonial and government.⁸⁷

Such interventions and reworkings of an authoritative text obviously came quite late in the career of Basil Lekapenos. Indeed, his remodeling of the *De ceremoniis* may have been a response to attacks on his position either toward the end of the reign of Tzimiskes, when Basil was criticized for illegally acquiring property in eastern Anatolia, or during the early 980s, when his great-nephew Basil II went to great lengths to force him into retirement.⁸⁸ Such a defensive context could also explain other reworkings of mid-tenth-century manuals by Basil. These include the insertion of a decree associated with Basil into the final pages of the second book of the *De ceremoniis*, which attempted to restore to the control of imperial eunuchs (i.e., Basil himself) funds that had been siphoned off into the military treasury. It might also be the reason that amid coverage in the *De administrando* of Byzantine-Armenian relations in the ninth century, a reference appears to a house in Constantinople, once owned by the princely family of Taron from Byzantium's eastern frontier and now the possession of Basil the parakoimomenos.⁸⁹

Basil may also have sought to defend his political position through similar practices in earlier periods of his life. The likelihood is certainly strong that Basil was responsible for the overall project to legitimize Constantine VII through the sponsorship of compilations. He has, for instance, been seen as the guiding spirit behind the original collection of materials for the *De administrando*, *De ceremoniis*, and *De thematibus* in the 940s and early 950s.⁹⁰ However, these efforts may have been intended to promote not only his imperial master but also Basil himself. One sign of this self-interest comes in chapter 50 of the *De administrando*, where Basil appears last in a list of imperial *parakoimomenoi*.⁹¹ An even more important witness to Basil's self-promotion may be the slim manual he com-

missioned on maritime warfare, the *Naumachika*. As a recent study of this text has made clear, the manual itself contains very little contemporary or indeed any practical advice on the subject of naval warfare. Instead it takes the form of an elaborate preface, addressed to Basil himself, that has been tacked on to a reworking of much earlier materials, including materials about ships from the fifth-century *Onomasticon* of Julius Pollux. Where illustrative examples are provided, they tend to be drawn from scholia on Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian Wars* and the *Odyssey* rather than from actual contemporary knowledge. As a result, the text's modern editors have treated this work as an antiquarian literary exercise on the part of the compiler, whom they identify as a member of Basil's own household, and whom they believe may have had access to the private library of the parakoimomenos.⁹²

Some of these ideas are interesting and worth pursuing further. It is clear, for instance, that the text was written by someone who wished to praise the military exploits and reputation of Basil himself and was close enough to the parakoimomenos to be commissioned to undertake the collection. The notion of a private library is also appealing, given the recent suggestion that one of the two surviving manuscripts of the *De ceremoniis* may have been for the parakoimomenos's personal use.⁹³ But there are signs in the preface that this *Naumachika* belongs to a more explicitly political context. First, both the dedicatory poem with which the work opens and the formal prooimion to the text offer copious praise for the military reputation and achievements of Basil himself, dwelling on the success that the parakoimomenos has enjoyed on the battlefield against the Hamdanids.⁹⁴ Second, the preface seeks to suggest that because of Basil's unparalleled victories in land warfare, and the degree to which he surpasses all other competitors, he is bound to succeed in the equally difficult enterprise of naval warfare.⁹⁵ Third, it points to the fact that Basil was a very divisive

87 Featherstone, "Further Remarks," 113–14.

88 *Leonis Diaconi Caloënsis Historiae Libri Decem*, ed. C. B. Hase, CSHB [5] (Bonn, 1828), 176–77.

89 For the decree as it appears in *De cer.*, see Featherstone, "Further Remarks," 115–19. For the house of Basil, see *DAI*, 190 (cited in Ševčenko, "Re-reading Constantine Porphyrogenitus" [n. 6 above], 191).

90 Ševčenko, "Re-reading Constantine Porphyrogenitus," 185; Featherstone, "Further Remarks," *passim*.

91 *DAI*, 244.

92 Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, esp. 183–86.

93 Featherstone, "Further Remarks," 120–21; Ševčenko, "Re-reading Constantine Porphyrogenitus," 191, points in a similar direction in his comments about the appearance of Basil in *DAI*, chap. 43.

94 Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 522–27.

95 *Ibid.*, 524–25: "you who by conflicts on land have gladdened the emperors themselves . . . you who will show . . . that deeds at sea are equal to those on land" (trans. Pryor and Jeffreys).

figure, one who had enemies as well as friends and supporters: “However, it happens that both those who favour you and those who bear you ill will suffer the same thing. When they are defeated they rejoice and take pleasure equally, the one group because they are victorious and remain so through your forethought, the other because they have been defeated by no others than by you, who are superior to all in good counsel and might.”⁹⁶

Noting the reference to Crete’s still being in the hands of the Hamdanids in the laudatory poem that introduces the *Naumachika*, the editors of this text have argued for dating it to the period at the end of Constantine VII’s reign before Basil was ousted by Romanos II (959–62). Certainly it has to postdate the battle for Samosata in 958 and predate 961, when Crete was finally taken by the general Nikephoros Phokas.⁹⁷ However, the explicitly propagandist and political tone of the preface makes this literary endeavor look like a serious rhetorical intervention on the part of a member of Basil’s circle at the tail end of Constantine VII’s reign, an intervention whose purpose can be read several ways. One is that this text is an attempt on the part of Basil to defend himself and promote his own cause during Romanos’s reign, above all during his struggle for control of the imperial administration with the rival eunuch, Joseph Bringas.⁹⁸ Another is that this text was designed to deflect memories about the defeat at Crete that Constantine Porphyrogennetos had endured in 949, with which Basil must have been associated in his capacity as the emperor’s senior adviser.⁹⁹ Or perhaps by the late 950s it was clear that another attack on Crete was planned, but doubts existed as to who would organize and lead that assault. Could it be that this manual was designed to put forward Basil’s credentials or to undermine the qualifications of a rival?¹⁰⁰

96 Ibid., 524–27; quotation, 525.

97 Ibid., 183–84.

98 On the conflict with Bringas, see Brokkaar, “Basil Lacapenos” (n. 83 above), 214–18; Featherstone, “Further Remarks,” 118–20.

99 On the failure of 949, see *Leonis Diaconi Caloënsis Historiae*, 7; Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 245–46. Both historians explicitly blame the expedition’s lack of success on the ineffective leadership of Constantine Gongylios, one of the palace eunuchs and presumably an associate of Basil. On the logistics and organization of the expedition itself, see Haldon, “Theory and Practice” (n. 54 above), 200–352.

100 Hints at this buildup of energy come in Leo the Deacon’s comments that as soon as Romanos II succeeded to the throne in

While this final interpretation is somewhat speculative, there are other parallels for connecting the production of a military manual and the presentation of martial credentials, particularly by those whose careers were more closely associated with the imperial palace than the battlefield. Consider, for instance, the vast compilation of military materials put together by Nikephoros Ouranos, whose career took him from a series of desk jobs during the reign of Basil II to the vanguard of the emperor’s campaigns against the Bulgarians, and thereafter to an important role as governor of Antioch, Byzantium’s key center on the eastern frontier.¹⁰¹ In Ouranos’s case we have independent evidence that Nikephoros and his associates felt that the general was surrounded by those who would be only too willing to stab him in the back. In his own letters Nikephoros refers to the petty quarrels, rivalries, and jealousies that accompanied a Byzantine army on the move.¹⁰² When his friend Leo, metropolitan of Synada, heard about Nikephoros’s remarkable success against the Bulgarians in 997 at the battle of Spercheios he sent Ouranos a letter rejoicing at the news but hoping that Nikephoros would be able to avoid the blows of envy.¹⁰³ He also showed pleasure that Ouranos had demonstrated that one can be both a philosopher and a general, a theme of dual competence picked up in the correspondence of another of the general’s associates—in this case, a letter of praise from Philetos Synadenos, the *krites* of Tarsos, sent to Nikephoros following the general’s successful conduct of a military operation in the east. Philetos casts himself in his correspondence as the man of letters who in contrast to Nikephoros has not been able to master military skills. At the very least, the Ouranos-centered correspondence

959, he was keen to launch another attack on Crete (*Leonis Diaconi Caloënsis Historiae*, 7).

101 For the career of Ouranos, see McGeer, “Tradition and Reality” (n. 35 above), passim; see also Holmes, *Basil II*, 349–52, 383–88; on his *Taktika*, see Dain, *La ‘Tactique’* (n. 17 above), passim; McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth* (n. 6 above), 79–167.

102 *Épistoliers byzantins du Xe siècle*, ed. J. Darrouzès, AOC 6 (Paris, 1960), 244–47 (letter 47 from the Ouranos collection). A well-known example of a quarrel on campaign was that between Basil II’s generals Leo Melissenos and Stephen Kontostephanos, a dispute that allegedly contributed to imperial defeat by the Bulgarians in 986 (Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 330–31).

103 *The Correspondence of Leo, Metropolitan of Synada and Syncellus*, ed. and trans. M. P. Vinson, CFHB 23 (Washington, DC, 1985), 22–23 (letter 13).

suggests that there was a debate within tenth-century Byzantine political circles about whether careers behind a desk and on campaign were compatible. This impression is confirmed by the late tenth-century historian Leo the Deacon in a hortatory speech that he puts into the mouth of John Tzimiskes during the 963 coup carried out by Nikephoros Phokas. According to Leo, John urged Phokas to seize the reins of imperial power precisely on the grounds that Joseph Bringas, the then parakoimomenos, should not have control over the empire's armed forces: "For I think it is wrong, nay intolerable, for Roman generals to be led and to be dragged by the nose, hither and thither like slaves, by a wretched eunuch from the wastes of Paphlagonia, who has insinuated himself into political power."¹⁰⁴ Given the vituperative presentation of this sentiment, it is unsurprising that commanders like Ouranos who had a palace background felt the need to prove themselves not just by their deeds on the battlefield but also by their association with the written traditions of military wisdom. By orchestrating a compilation that drew on both the *Taktika* of an armchair commander like Leo VI and the *Praecepta militum* of the more militarily active Nikephoros Phokas, Ouranos was able to place his own personal observations about campaigning on Byzantium's eastern frontier onto formidably authoritative foundations.¹⁰⁵

The careers of Nikephoros Ouranos and before him Basil Lekapenos are high-profile examples of the close connections between compilation literature and political advancement. It is plausible, however, that this nexus of literature and career progression could also have existed at less august levels. In a culture so saturated with compilation literature, to produce a representative of this genre of literature might be an important first step on the political ladder. The modern editors of

Basil Lekapenos's *Naumachika* have hypothesized that the editor was in fact quite a junior figure. The compiler himself speaks of offering the text that he has produced for Basil as a gift.¹⁰⁶ Thus it appears that compilation literature could help advance the careers not only of the lofty sponsors of such works but also of those who physically selected or copied their contents, or bore the cost of editorial and scribal activity. We know, for instance, that the personal client base of the parakoimomenos was extensive.¹⁰⁷ Current members of that circle and potential newcomers needed to find ways of proving their worth. It is also possible that the principle of compilation as a means for social and political advancement explains some of the tenth-century compilations that apparently are connected to the court of Constantine VII but do not seem to have been directly sponsored by the emperor himself. The likelihood is strong that works such as the *Geoponica*, the medical treatise of Theophanes Nonnos, and the *Bestiary*, all of which contained explicit paeans of praise for Constantine, were at some level gifts designed to win their donors the emperor's esteem and to secure lucrative offices and titles. Evidence for such a reading may be found in the allegation by the author of the sixth book of the chronicle now known as *Theophanes Continuatus* that the emperor was inclined to offer offices and titles as rewards to those

104 *Leonis Diaconi Caloënsis Historiae*, 40; A.-M. Talbot and D. F. Sullivan, trans., *The History of Leo the Deacon: Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century* (Washington, DC, 2005), 90.

105 The very substantial borrowing from both Leo and Nikephoros was established by Dain, *La 'Tactique'*, 19–37. Chapters 1–55 are taken from Leo; chapters 56–62, from Nikephoros; the remaining 107 chapters (chaps. 66–172), from more ancient authorities like Onasander but probably via intermediary military compilations that are now lost. Three chapters (chap. 63–65) are Ouranos's own thoughts on campaigning in the east (McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, 80, 143–63); see also below, 75.

106 Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ* (n. 6 above), 185, 526.

107 A good indication of the size and endurance of this network comes from the sustained efforts required to break it up after the parakoimomenos's death in 985. Legislative attempts continued as late as 996 (Holmes, *Basil II* [n. 75 above], 469–75). A number of associates within the parakoimomenos's network have been identified, including the poet John Geometres and the hagiographer Symeon Metaphrastes; see M. D. Lauxtermann, "John Geometres—Poet and Scholar," *Byzantion* 58 (1999): 356–80; Högel, *Symeon Metaphrastes* (n. 5 above), 70. There are signs in the epistolography of the late 10th century that other erstwhile associates of the parakoimomenos suffered removal of their privileges after 985, including Leo, metropolitan of Synada (Vinson, *Correspondence of Leo*, 68–71, letter 43). Even some of the letters of Nikephoros Ouranos suggest that he too once was part of the same political network: see *Épistoliers byzantins*, 219–20 (letter 5 of the Ouranos collection); see also Vinson, *Correspondence of Leo*, 116. The network of several thousand supporters that Basil Lekapenos could rally in Constantinople was a vital element in the success of the coup of Nikephoros Phokas in 963; they burned down the houses of those associated with Joseph Bringas, the chief opponent to Basil at the end of the reign of Romanos II, and seized the palace in advance of Phokas's arrival (*Leonis Diaconi Caloënsis Historiae*, 46–47; Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 258–58).

who were explicitly involved in learning.¹⁰⁸ And indeed, medieval societies other than Byzantium offer parallels for authoritative texts' serving as the medium through which relationships of political service and protection could be negotiated. In a noteworthy case in the Islamic world, Muslim scholar-administrators sought to enter the service of Saladin after the fall of Jerusalem in 1187 by offering him books about jihad.¹⁰⁹

Compilation as Critique

Thus far we have been concerned with the degree to which compilation texts helped build the careers and legitimize the authority of individual actors within Byzantine political life. But compilations could also be used in more destructive and subversive ways; indeed, efforts to advance and preserve one career or position quite frequently went hand in hand with attacks on the integrity of another politician. The military manual *De velitatione* is a particularly good case in point. As we have already seen, this manual on defensive guerrilla warfare tactics has usually been attributed to a compiler close to the Phokas family.¹¹⁰ Those making this attribution point mainly to the preface, where the compiler claims to have been commissioned by the emperor Nikephoros to write down the methods of defensive warfare for future generations despite the current break from such warfare. The preface also includes substantial praise for other members of the Phokas family as experienced practitioners of the art of skirmishing, particularly during the recent wars with the Hamdanids.¹¹¹ There are also two small indirect references in the text to successful ambushes against the Hamdanids, at least one of which seems to refer to victory for Leo Phokas, the brother of the emperor. In addition there is a much longer reference to a victory achieved after a counterattack against Cilicia by Nikephoros Phokas, the grandfather of the mid-tenth-century emperor. The episode occurred during the reign of Leo VI; and, strikingly, the author of *De velitatione* invokes the authority of that emperor's *Taktika* as supporting evidence for his

narrative.¹¹² Otherwise, for the most part the manual contains recommendations about fighting border wars against superior Arab numbers. This treatise therefore has usually been interpreted as a fairly rare example of a handbook dedicated to contemporary warfare.¹¹³ However, while the historian of frontier fighting can undoubtedly glean much useful data from *De velitatione*, the text contains more overtly propagandist elements, too. These include elements of praise for one particular family and its immediate associates, which stand in conspicuous contrast to the anonymity of other commanders whose exploits are referred to.¹¹⁴ In addition, in the midst of a section on training and armaments is unexpectedly inserted a polemical outburst about the need to pay troops properly, to recognize the authority of the *strategoi* of the themes, and to end the interference and oppression caused by "tribute-levying manikins" dispatched from Constantinople.¹¹⁵ Taken together, all these characteristics raise the suspicion that *De velitatione* might represent one or more older works on border warfare, reshaped to serve the Phokas family's political interests. This suspicion becomes even more pronounced when we take into account signs—including shifts in authorial voice, repetition, compression, and unexpected false conclusions—that the text itself has been subjected to processes of rewriting, editing, and amalgamation.¹¹⁶

112 Ibid., 156–57, 218–19; for more on the reference to Leo VI's *Taktika*, see Dagron and Mihăescu, *Le Traité sur la guérilla*, 160.

113 Dagron and Mihăescu, *Le Traité sur la guérilla*, 32–135; J. F. Haldon and H. Kennedy, "The Arabo-Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Military and Society in the Borderlands," *ZRVI* 19 (1980): 79–116.

114 Thus a family close to the Phokades, the Maleinoi, are named in the preface, while the exploits of the Armenian commander Melias are left without attribution (Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, 148–49, 220–21).

115 Ibid., 214–17; quotation, 217; this polemic has been termed a manifesto by Dagron and Mihăescu, *Le Traité sur la guérilla*, 165, 259–74.

116 E.g., the compiler suddenly shifts from the third person to the second person between chapters 12 and 13 (Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, 188–89); the two chapters immediately after this shift seem to recapitulate points about protecting a commander's forces that have already been made earlier in the text (ibid., chaps. 14–15). Further instances of repetition concern the preparation of ambushes (ibid., 208–10) and attacking enemy raiders when they are in the process of gathering booty and driving them into ambushes (206–11, 224–27). Discontinuities within the text also point to the compression of underlying source materials. Thus, in chap. 17

108 Theophanes Continuatus, 446.

109 D. S. Richards, trans., *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin* (Aldershot, 2002), 102.

110 See Dagron and Mihăescu, *Le Traité sur la guérilla* (n. 35 above), 161–75; also see above, 57.

111 Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (n. 6 above), 148–49.

To be sure, a compelling context exists for a Phokas propaganda initiative in the later tenth century, especially after the assassination of the emperor Nikephoros Phokas in 969 by John Tzimiskes and his associates. During the reign of Tzimiskes, the Phokas family found themselves out of favor and deprived of office. Members expressed their frustration and put forward their own claims to imperial authority by undertaking direct military action against the new emperor.¹¹⁷ It may be that *De velitatione* was drawn up to accompany this period of insurrection.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, there is also a strong possibility that this written propaganda may belong to a slightly later period—the early years of the adult reigns of Basil II and his brother Constantine VIII. *De velitatione* itself contains some hints to this effect when it refers to “the holy emperors” in the polemical section about rapacious and interfering tax collectors. This use of the plural would make better sense after 976 rather than during the Tzimiskes’ hegemony.¹¹⁹ More tellingly, its invective about the undermining of the authority of strategoi in the eastern themes and soldiers’ morale fits very neatly with other late tenth-century evidence, including that coming from a relatively independent Arab eyewitness at the Constantinopolitan court. Ibn Shahram, an envoy from the Buyid court of Baghdad, mentions debates between Basil II and his eastern generals, especially the Phokades, about leadership of the army and foreign policy objectives in the east. Indeed, according to the later interpretation of John Skylitzes, it was Basil’s decision to abandon eastern objectives and focus on warfare in the Balkans that precipitated the most serious revolt against his imperial authority:

reference is made to the commander of “the 300 hundred men who had been dispatched to guard villages” (207), erroneously implying that we have already been told about this detachment of 300. Finally, the lines ending chap. 17 seem more appropriate for the end of a treatise rather than simply the conclusion of a chapter: “In conclusion, then, we have done our part by writing down these things just as our predecessors handed them on to us, as well as from our own experience, which goes back a long time” (210–11).

117 For Phokas-led coups during the reign of Tzimiskes, see *Leonis Diaconi Caloënsis Historiae*, 112–27; Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 291–94.

118 *De velitatione* has been dated to the period after the death of Nikephoros Phokas by Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, 140; others have raised the possibility that it could date to after the death of Tzimiskes in 976 (Dagron and Mihăescu, *Le Traité sur la guerre*, 163–64).

119 Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, 216–17.

the uprising led by Bardas Phokas, the nephew of the former emperor, in 987.¹²⁰ As is well known, this rebellion gained momentum following Basil’s disastrous foray of 986 against the armies of Samuel of Bulgaria, which ambushed him in the Haimos Mountains. Contemporary sources, including Leo the Deacon, put this defeat down to logistical bungling on the part of the imperial authorities, and a modern scholar has suggested that another military manual usually dated to this period—*De re militari* (*Campaign Organization and Tactics*), which deals with Balkan warfare—was compiled as a response to the catastrophe of 986.¹²¹ If so, then it appears that Basil II faced critics on all fronts who chose to articulate their own opposition to his rule through the vehicle of compilation literature. In this context, it is worth noting that the polemic about proper payment of troops and respect for the authority of the *strategos* found in *De velitatione* is repeated in abbreviated form in *De re militari* as well.¹²²

Compilation as Debate

For much of this discussion I have been concerned with an interpretation of compilation which fits quite neatly within the paradigm of a competitive court culture that many Byzantine historians have seen as a defining characteristic of politics in middle Byzantium. Whether scholars have chosen to focus on salaries, titles, artistic patronage, aristocratic families, or even coups, their work often develops the basic point that Byzantine politics was shaped by an intense rivalry between various political agents to access the material and status rewards available at the imperial court,

120 Holmes, *Basil II* (n. 75 above), 466–68; for the Arab evidence, see A. Beihammer, “Der harte Sturz des Bardas Skleros: Eine Fallstudie zu zwischenstaatliche Kommunikation und Konfliktführung in der byzantinisch-arabischen Diplomatie des 10. Jahrhunderts,” *Römische Historische Mitteilungen* 45 (2003): 21–57; Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 332.

121 *Leonis Diaconi Caloënsis Historiae*, 171–73; Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, text at 246–326; for the suggestion that it was written in response to the events of 986, see Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, 242.

122 Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, 320–21. Parallels in content and verbal patterning between *De velitatione* and the *De re militari* have been observed by Dagron and Mihăescu, who also point to the pro-army polemic in both texts. They suggest that the same compiler may have been responsible for editing both treatises, albeit at different times in the final three decades of the 10th century (Dagron and Mihăescu, *Le Traité sur la guerre*, 160, 171–74, 274).

including the title of emperor itself.¹²³ This competitive dimension to court life was an essential component of the political culture of Byzantium, and one that helps us make sense of the production of various forms of compilation literature—but there is another way of approaching Byzantine politics and the political dimension of compilation texts. While the picture conveyed by many contemporary middle Byzantine historians suggests that the political life of the empire was a never-ending, and sometimes very bloody, struggle for the reins of power, evidence from compilations may present a somewhat different perspective on Byzantine politics. Constant copying, reuse, synthesis, homogenizing, reorganizing, and updating of earlier materials by those who took part (or wished to take part) in government meant that compilation could help explain and legitimize contemporary change, not just at the level of individual and family fortunes but also in the realms of policy and practice. Compilation literature could, in certain ways, become the medium through which members of the Byzantine administration and court considered, and even debated, contemporary political issues, ranging from questions about the empire's defense, to its allies and enemies, and even the nature of the empire itself.

Some of the strongest signs that discussions about contemporary issues were carried out in this literature can be seen in the many military handbooks produced during the tenth and early eleventh centuries. Foremost among the subjects debated was the relationship of ancient military traditions to action against the empire's contemporary foes. Here middle Byzantine authors sought to turn the authority of a compilation of ancient materials to their own advantage. For instance, one way of persuading others of the likely efficacy of an editor's own recommendations was to include them within the pages of devices and tactics that were inherited from the

past.¹²⁴ Thus, in the section of his *Taktika* dedicated to naval warfare Leo VI mentions the invention of devices designed to attack enemy ships both by men of old and by more recent figures. Alongside recommendations from the sixth-century *Strategikon of Maurice*, Leo also includes handheld Greek fire-throwing devices that he has recently invented.¹²⁵ The insertion of novelties amid more long-standing tactics is also discernible in some of the prescriptions found in tenth-century siege warfare manuals, including the utilization of human excrement.¹²⁶ At a more general level, in his *Taktika* Leo VI makes a strong case for military science as a constantly evolving field to which those from the past, those from the present, and those in the future can make legitimate contributions.¹²⁷

Beyond seeking to authorize novelty, the military texts also suggest nuanced engagement with the question of how far the technology and tactics of the ancient past could be adapted to current martial situations. At one level, compilers of military manuals seem to have been interested in how the military technology of the ancient world was built and how it functioned. In the preface to the *Parangelmata poliorcetica* the compiler lists a series of siege machines, including rams, tortoises, wooden towers, ladders, digging tools, and bridges, which he claims can be built “following the ancient master builders.”¹²⁸ Other writers explicitly link current conflicts and the accumulated wisdom of previous experience. In his comments on naval warfare Leo VI followed a generalized discussion about barbarian counterattacks at sea with a more specific observation about the current practices of Saracens.¹²⁹ Indeed, some texts seem to use the vehicle of military manual to express a more polemical point: that the wisdom

123 P. Lemerle, “*Roga et rente d'état aux xe–xie siècles*,” *REB* 25 (1967): 77–100; Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance* (n. 3 above); idem, “Fortune et puissance de l'aristocratie,” in *Hommes et richesses dans l'empire byzantin*, ed. V. Kravari, J. Lefort, and C. Morrisson, 2 vols. (Paris, 1989–91), 2:199–213; Whittow, *Making of Orthodox Byzantium* (n. 63 above), esp. chap. 5; A. P. Kazhdan and M. McCormick, “The Social World of the Byzantine Court,” in *Byzantine Court Culture*, ed. H. Maguire (Washington, DC, 1997), 167–97; N. Oikonomides, “Title and Income at the Byzantine Court,” in *ibid.*, 199–215.

124 For this general point, see also Dagron and Mihăescu, *Le Traité sur la guérilla*, 140.

125 Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the ΔPOMΩN* (n. 6 above), 506–9 (chaps. 59–64); Dennis, *Taktika*, 526–29; see also chap. 69 on pikes inserted through oar ports; such examples seem to contradict the concern that Leo was not particularly interested in technological developments (Dagron and Mihăescu, *Le Traité sur la guérilla*, 144).

126 Sullivan, “Byzantine Instructional Manual” (n. 6 above), 308–9.

127 Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the ΔPOMΩN*, 510–11 (chaps. 71–72); Dennis, *Taktika*, 530–31.

128 Sullivan, *Siegecraft* (n. 6 above), 28–30.

129 Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the ΔPOMΩN*, 489–90 (chaps. 15–16); Dennis, *Taktika*, 508–11.

of the past *ought* to be put to use in the present day. The compiler of *De obsidione toleranda* uses historical discussion of defensive siege techniques to draw a conclusion about contemporary warfare. He insists that if a commander who is defending a city under siege has just a few defensive machines, then “you will easily overcome the enemy. For the leaders of the foreign peoples in our time bear no resemblance to those of old in spirit or inventiveness nor are they comparable in their forces but fall far short of them.”¹³⁰ But not all commanders or commentators were convinced by this line of reasoning. This, at least, seems to be the point that Nikephoros Ouranos makes in his *Taktika* when he alludes to the obsolescence of many of the ancient methods of siegecraft and states that undermining is the technique of choice in modern warfare.¹³¹ That is to say, Nikephoros apparently relies on the authoritative format of compilation literature to convey the wisdom that he has gained in the field as he argues against once again pressing ancient techniques into service.

Finally, while discussions about technology and tactics were an important characteristic of middle Byzantine military manuals, it is also possible that this literary medium may have enabled contemporaries to debate issues as profound as the very nature and security of the Byzantine state. Indeed, the sudden explosion in the production of military manuals in the tenth and early eleventh centuries may have been more closely connected with contemporary concerns about the nature of a rapidly militarizing Byzantine state than with ideas about the contemporary relevance of ancient military technology and tactics. As we have already seen, the tenth century was a period of extensive military reorganization and expansion that had far-reaching implications for the size and operation of the state, especially its capacity to provide enough resources for the demands of an all-consuming military machine.¹³² In addition, it is clear from other medieval contexts that an upheaval in the relationship between the state and army could spark the reissue and copying of ancient military manuals. For example, Christopher

Allmand has recently explored the case of late medieval western Europe and has suggested that enthusiasm for late Roman military compilations written in Latin, such as Vegetius’s *De re militari*, was very closely linked with contemporary concerns about the changing relationship of army and state. His evidence is found in marginalia in the late medieval manuscripts of these late Roman military handbooks, where concerns about how the development of standing armies may affect the organization of the state and the state’s responsibilities to the broader political community are most conspicuously voiced. Allmand’s point is that late Roman military texts, which themselves explored the complex relationship between the state and a professional army, were the ideal vehicle for late medieval contemporaries to express their own worries about similar issues.¹³³

What holds true for medieval writings from western Europe may not, of course, necessarily apply fully to an earlier period and a different linguistic tradition. However, there are some distinct signs that the relationship between the state and the army was a hot issue in tenth-century Byzantine circles. For instance, the preamble to Constantine VII’s decree on military finance reveals an imperial concern about how the state was to finance an army without running the risk that individual commanders will divert troops for their own private purposes. As the first sentence of the preface states: “the army is to the state as the head is to the body; when the one changes so does the other.”¹³⁴ A scathing aside in *De velitatione* on the rapacity of imperial tax collectors and judges, their undermining of traditional military authority, and their corrosive effect on soldiers’ morale highlights an alternative angle. In this case, the compiler argues that the threat comes from the state to the army, rather than from the army to the state.¹³⁵ Yet though the legislation of Constantine and *De velitatione* interpret the connections between

130 Sullivan, “Byzantine Instructional Manual,” 228–29 (chap. 84); the same sentiment is expressed in a slightly later passage that has been inserted into chap. 98 (256–57).

131 McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth* (n. 6 above), 160–63; see also above, 74.

132 See above, 66, 75.

133 C. Allmand, “The *De re militari* of Vegetius in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance,” in *Writing War: Medieval Literary Responses to Warfare*, ed. C. Saunders, F. le Saux, and N. Thomas (Cambridge, 2004), 15–28. There are some signs that Vegetius’s text was known in 10th-century Byzantium; see McCabe, *Horse Medicine* (n. 6 above), 279. Allmand also looks at earlier medieval reuse of Vegetius in the West.

134 N. Svoronos, *Les Nouvelles des Empereurs Macédoniens concernant la terre et les stratiotes* (Athens, 1994), 118 (lines 1–2).

135 Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (n. 6 above), 214–17.

emperors and soldiers differently, both texts accept the fundamental importance of army–state relations for the empire’s general well-being. This shared ground is reflected in the conspicuous appearance in both texts of appeals to the common good.¹³⁶

This shared framework of reference can be found in other texts as well. Indeed, in many other military compilations beyond *De velitatione* various compilers paid a surprising degree of attention to a nexus of ideas that helped define the relationship between the army and the common good. This framework of principles included using resources that belonged to the state, such as taxation, to keep up the morale of the soldiers. A complementary concern was that local communities should not be oppressed by military demands.¹³⁷ An additional important theme was the adequate provision of weapons, horses, and armaments; yet another, the need for strong training and discipline.¹³⁸ But perhaps the most important body of ideas concerned the duties and responsibilities of the general (*strategos*), whom most military manuals identified as the crucial intermediary in this relationship between army and state. It is to the strategos that most of the prescriptions of such treatises are addressed; it is the strategos who is responsible for paying the soldiers and sustaining their morale; it is the strategos who must create a climate of discipline; it is the strategos who must protect local communities, not just from the enemy but also from the army itself. Nowhere is this emphasis on the qualities of the strategos more pronounced than in the military writings of Emperor Leo VI, whose treatise is itself

addressed to the strategos. The second of the constitutions of Leo’s *Taktika* deals precisely with the material and moral qualities that a strategos should have. It is also striking that when he came to draw up his own *Taktika*, Nikephoros Ouranos opened his compilation with a paraphrase of Leo’s thoughts on the matter.¹³⁹

Byzantine military manuals’ focus on the strategos may seem obvious, but it is still worth pointing out some important parallels with the medieval west. For as Christopher Allmand has noted, one of the dimensions of Vegetius’s text that strongly appealed to late medieval readers was its detailed scrutiny of the duties and responsibilities of the general.¹⁴⁰ This was then a pressing question in the late medieval west, as contemporaries faced the question of whether full-time mercenary commanders would serve the state or subvert it to their own ends. I would argue that the expansion and success of the middle Byzantine army posed similar problems for tenth-century emperors. As we have seen, anxieties about whether the generals were likely to serve themselves rather than the emperor and the state he represented are expressed in the decree of Constantine VII; they also surface in his letters addressed to his commanders in the east.¹⁴¹ Constantine’s own elevation to ultimate authority was backed by military force as embodied in the Phokas family, support that left him vulnerable and insecure. Constantine’s own complex relationship with raw military power, together with the decades of military coups against imperial authority that followed his death, suggests that contemporaries were right to be concerned about the relationship between the power of the generals and the state they were paid to serve. It is highly likely that this concern about the role of the army, and above all of its leaders, led contemporaries to search for models of correct behavior in the late Roman tradition of military manuals. Such concern would certainly help explain the immense popularity of these manuals in the decades when military expansion was most aggressive and the generals at their most powerful.



136 Ibid., 216 (lines 47–48); Svoronos, *Les Nouvelles*, 118 (lines 3–4).

137 See, for instance, Leo VI’s naval injunctions: Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 490–93; Dennis, *Taktika*, 510–11.

138 On the provision of weapons, horses, and armaments, see Dennis, *Taktika*, 74–103 (Constitutions 5 and 6); Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 492–93; Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, 288–89; see the entirety of the *Præcepta militum* of Nikephoros Phokas and the paraphrase of his treatise by Nikephoros Ouranos for concerns about equipment and dress (McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth*, passim); on training, see Dennis, *Taktika*, 104–45 (Constitution 7); Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 494–95; Dennis, *Taktika*, 514–15; Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, 318–23; on discipline, see Pryor and Jeffreys, *Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ*, 496–99, and n. 22, which refers to the disciplinary regulations elsewhere in Leo VI’s *Taktika*, esp. at Constitution 8 (Dennis, *Taktika*, 147–53); Dennis, *Taktika*, 516–17; on all these issues, see Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, 214–17.

139 Dennis, *Taktika*, 18–37; on Ouranos, see Dain, *La ‘Tactique’* (n. 17 above), 19–20.

140 Allmand, “*De re militari* of Vegetius,” esp. 19–20.

141 See above, 67.

Over a number of years Averil Cameron has made an impassioned call for historians of the seventh to ninth centuries to cease decrying the lack of secular history and to look in more detail at the very large quantities of written texts in other genres that survive from this period. In making this call, Cameron urges historians of Byzantium to take account of the kinds of texts that mattered to Byzantines in any generation rather than limiting ourselves to the sort of literature with which we feel most comfortable.¹⁴² If we are to take her injunction seriously, then any historian of Byzantium in the tenth and early eleventh centuries needs to consider the very large number of texts created by copying, editing, updating, and synthesizing Roman and early Byzantine materials. Because of the surge of research into compilation literature in recent years by literary historians, much more is now known about the mechanics of these productions. However, the political import of Byzantine enthusiasm for this form of literary activity is only just beginning to be appreciated. In this article I have sketched how certain kinds of compilation literature, especially handbooks concerned with statecraft and military manuals, can offer us important clues about how the Byzantines in one particular period understood their empire, how they competed for resources and power within that empire, and how they sought to protect it. This vast body of written culture—apparently composed of obsolete rubbish, with only occasional interventions on the part of contemporary compilers—may, I suggest, help open up the political culture of Byzantium.

The picture here outlined is of necessity incomplete. It is partial because I have been able only to scratch the surface of what is a huge amount of text. It is also partial because I have confined myself to the imperial court and those who operated at the center of power. Nonetheless, it legitimately raises the question

of whether the kind of political culture I have described extended beyond Constantinople and the senior echelons of officials into the provinces, and indeed beyond the political frontiers of Byzantium itself. There are, of course, signs that contemporaries far beyond the inner circles of imperial power were interested in both the personalities and the debates at the center of Byzantine politics in this period, as the narratives about the Byzantine court in the lively accounts of Liudprand of Cremona demonstrate.¹⁴³ Testimony about Byzantine politics also surfaces in the writings of contemporary Arabic and Armenian historians who were active on the imperial frontiers in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Strikingly, their interpretations seem to be based on recent Greek histories, a dynamic that itself points to the transmission of written information about Byzantine politics at a considerable distance from Constantinople itself.¹⁴⁴

Whether contemporaries in, and even beyond, the provinces of Byzantium could, like their Constantinopolitan peers, engage with such issues through the medium of compilation literature is as yet unclear. But there are some signs pointing in this direction. First, it is important to remember that the voice adopted by the mid-tenth-century compiler of *De velitatione* when criticizing imperial interference in military affairs is that of the serving officer in the eastern localities. And by the middle of the eleventh century, the signs that provincials could participate in debates about administration and governance are even stronger. Kekaumenos, a middle-ranking military official based in central Greece, felt confident enough to elaborate his own ideas about a vast range of contemporary issues, including how generals and emperors should conduct relations both within the imperial government and with neighboring potentates. As Charlotte Roueché's close reading of Kekaumenos's book *Anecdotes and Advice* has shown, he was willing to touch on and give

142 Av. Cameron, "New Themes and Styles in Greek Literature: 7th and 8th Centuries," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, vol. 1, *Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. Av. Cameron and L. I. Conrad (Princeton, NJ, 1992), 81–105; eadem, "Texts as Weapons: Polemic in the Byzantine Dark Ages," in *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, ed. A. Bowman and G. Woolf (Cambridge, 1994), 198–215. A similar point about the need to draw on a heterogeneity of sources for the 7th century rather than contemporary historiography alone is made by J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture* (Cambridge, 1990), esp. xix–xxiii.

143 Liudprand of Cremona, *Antapodosis; Homelia paschalis; Historia Ottonis; Relatio de Legatione Constantinopolitana*, ed. P. Chiesa, CCCM 156 (Turnhout, 1998), 9–16, 76–86, 135–38.

144 Such evidence surfaces in the later 10th- and early 11th-century testimonies of Yahya ibn Said and Stephen of Taron; see C. Holmes, "Byzantine Historians at the Periphery," 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies, London 2006 (www.wra11th.plus.com/byzcong/paper/V/V.1_Holmes.pdf); I am also grateful to Dr. Tim Greenwood of St Andrews University for sharing his views about Yahya and Stephen with me.

his own version of political stories and themes that also appear in eleventh-century texts much more closely associated with Constantinople, including the histories of Michael Psellos and John Skylitzes. Just where Kekaumenos gathered his fund of stories and aphorisms is uncertain. However, Roueché makes the sensible suggestion that much of his material was probably drawn from a variety of florilegia and handbooks, and then reworked in accordance with some very basic rhetorical prescriptions that Kekaumenos had picked up from the exercises in the Byzantine *progymnasmata*.¹⁴⁵ Perhaps even more striking than Kekaumenos's familiarity with the ideas and debates circulating in Constantinople or the books to which he had access is his decision to express his own ideas within a compilation. Did he choose this format because he thought it would give the imprimatur of legitimacy to his own formulations?

My final observation is that it can sometimes be difficult for a historian of Byzantine political history to reconcile the image of eternal imperial stability projected by texts such as the *De cerimoniis* with the stories of plots and feuds common in Byzantine historiography. Closer examination of how and why so much compilation literature was put together in middle

Byzantium may help us understand a political culture in which such apparently contradictory dynamics were at play. The preservation of ancient wisdom and experience in these literary productions made them the embodiment of eternal stability. In middle Byzantium, being associated with or inscribed into such an authoritative base was an important way of justifying personal power. In this way, the apparently ancient and obsolete could be put to highly practical use by individuals and groups in Byzantine politics. But equally, their employment of compilation literature could lead to certain kinds of conservative outcomes. For in associating their own power and objectives with the preservation of the existing order, individuals and groups contributed to an idea that there was indeed an existing order worth preserving. That existing order was sometimes referred to by those who contributed to the culture of compilation literature as "the common good." Whether those who engaged in the processes of compilation literature did so for their own careerist motives or for more disinterested and public-spirited reasons, the sheer repetition of motifs such as appeals to the common good was one way in which Byzantine political culture made the Byzantine state a contemporary reality.

145 Roueché, "Literary Background of Kekaumenos" (n. 36 above), 111–38; eadem, "The Rhetoric of Kekaumenos," in Jeffreys, ed., *Rhetoric in Byzantium* (n. 8 above), 23–37.

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